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DEVILMAN'S JUNGLE

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BY

GUSTAF BOLINDER

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To
Professor Gerard Lindblom
in memory of
nearly four decades
of friendship and collaboration

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FOREWORD

WHEN WRITING OF my travels in West and South Africa I have often mentioned the African's conception of supernatural powers. Here I have tried to give the reader an idea of what the white man calls jungle mysticism, but which to the black man is a reality filled with dangers.

I have had to confine myself to what is most characteristic of this strange world of ideas, and I have made my account of it a popular one. The main emphasis has been given to what is most typical for certain areas: the secret societies of Sierra Leone and Liberia, human sacrifice and cannibalism among the peoples of the Niger delta, the powerful witch doctors of South Africa.

To supplement my first-hand knowledge of these peoples I have had recourse to many other sources: e.g. the works of Hermann Baumann, P. Amaury Talbot, Ralph Eberl-Elber, Arthur Glyn Leonard, Frank Melland, D. Burrows, and such periodicals as *Nada* and *Journal of the African Society*. Most of the photographs are my own, but some of types from Sierra Leone are from Eberl Elber's book, several of those from Southern Angola have been taken by my companion Heinz Gerlach, and that of the negro pipe-smoker by Professor Amandus Johnson.

MAGIC OF THE WILDS

THERE WE WERE, two white men, sitting by ourselves in the dark in a large mud house deep within Liberia. Outside, the rain was spouting off the beard-like fringe of the roof, and here and there it was coming through the covering of palm leaves and dripping on to the earthern floor. Occasional flashes of lightning lit up the room, but the veil of the downpour left our surroundings indistinct.

No one was allowed to be out and everything had to be dark, for the demon of the forest was to leave his huge jungle-clad height, to the very foot of which the white planters' clearings had now reached.

He, the Mysterious One, the Supernatural One, the Terrifying One, the Majestic One, the most feared being in the primeval forest, was departing. Come not in his path, that is death! Everybody knew that. But as a warning sign there walks ahead of the forest demon a staff – it walks by itself, as though impelled by an invisible hand. Anyone out at night and catching sight of that staff in the glare of a flash of lightning flees headlong. He knows that it is the last moment. A little way behind the staff crawls a snake with stony shining eyes. Any being on whom the snake's gaze falls, halts as though nailed to the ground and is lost. For after the snake comes HE. At his approach the beholder falls down dead – none can endure the sight of the demon.

I had only been a few days in the interior of Liberia, but I had already encountered the mysticism of the jungle. You soon make its acquaintance in an undeveloped country with inadequate communications,

as this was. I had come on foot, by native paths and with a string of porters, to a Polish plantation in a part of the country where many of the Africans had hardly ever seen a white man.

It was in the primitive main building of this recently started plantation that we were sitting, the white manager and I. It was far too hot to close the shutters, and for that night a light was forbidden us. Nor could we sleep – the sound of the drums never paused. If there had been glass in the windows the panes would have been rattling with the beating of the drums and the peals of thunder. Unfortunately we could not even talk with each other properly. The manager was a Pole and spoke only his own tongue and a little Kpwesse – the local dialect. Of either language I knew only a few words. The Polish words were *wodka* and *woda* (vodka and water) and those two drinks were already on the table. We were usually able to converse using one of the foremen as interpreter – he was fairly at home in the English of the coastal people. But the servants and foremen had vanished from their huts on the other side of the open square. They had not dared remain in them, but had gone to join their fellows in the village.

Why did *we* sit like that, silent and sleepy, in the dark? Who had forbidden *us* to light a lamp? What had *we* to do with the demon of the forest? Well, a white man who settles in such a place must take account of the ideas and conceptions of the Negroes, even though he does not believe in them. There are risks involved in going against the customs that are linked with the natives' conception of the supernatural. The Polish plantation was a new one and depended on the local natives for its labour; therefore their beliefs had to be respected.

lt-site near a Chokwe village in Angola: a spirit's hut on poles, and a clay fetish.

Painted hut in north-eastern Angola.

All about the huge clearings where coffee or cacao had been planted stood solitary giant trees. They were taboo and were not to be felled. The spirits of the dead frequently take up residence in trees; and there is nothing the Negro venerates more, nothing he holds more sacred than his ancestors.

We have the evidence of natives how souls have a predilection for trees. An Ibo has described his fellow tribesmen's conception of this as follows:

'We believe that the spirits of the dead enter into or attach themselves to trees, stones or lumps of earth and clay. There are many men among us whose cares and sorrows are so heavy and grievous that they openly declare their intention of never returning to this existence, where people just enslave and kill each other. They wish to get inside some fixed object where they hope to be able to make sure of having peace and quiet. When such a person dies, after having informed his forefathers beforehand of his wish, he receives permission to return to earth and take up his abode in the object which he has selected for himself during his lifetime. If a spirit has entered into a tree in this way, that tree is at once considered sacred and is worshipped by the people because there is a soul in it. Trees are often chosen by the departed, and it is our custom that he who molests such a tree, merely by breaking a branch, offends the spirit and has forfeited his life.

'We know that in Oko and other places where they make canoes by hollowing out the trunks of trees, those who do the work are often killed by a spirit living in a tree. The witch doctors who can speak with these beings tell us that the spirits complain bitterly about being disturbed by busy people who have been seized with a working fit. They had gone to those trees to find a refuge from the restlessness of the world, but the

peace which they struggled so to keep was shattered. They had vainly hoped never to come up against the two-legged, inconsiderate beings who always interfere in other people's affairs instead of looking after their own and keeping away from what is protected.'

In this Liberian landscape it was not only solitary individual trees that had been left standing untouched. In the background, beneath the endless procession of rain-heavy clouds, rose the demon's hill covered with virgin forest and quite untouched. It might be trodden by neither black nor white. The mighty forest demon engaged the imagination of the Africans more than did other supernatural beings. The hill, where he dwelt, had never been cultivated. You could see that, for there is a visible difference between trees growing on land the forest has reclaimed and the untouched forest itself.

Well, the demon of the forest was intending to move. The black medicine men or witch doctors – they are the same thing – had communicated the fact. The demon had himself selected the place where the fraternity had to assemble and to which he had gone in order to inform them of his intention to leave the hill and withdraw to parts still unspoiled.

This was the night when he was to go. The Negroes had done no work all day. Their doors were barred early and the rhythmic thumping of drums came from their windowless huts. Not one streak of light was allowed to escape. The people could not even have lit the normal fire in their huts. As we sat there in the dark, the Pole and I, we felt lonely and oppressed. We knew that in the whole district there was not a soul out of doors and that all tracks and paths were deserted. There were no roads for vehicles there. What would the effect have been if a car had come clattering up

and lit up the surroundings with its cold sharp eyes? The demon of the forest knew what he was about. He was moving in time, before modern civilization with its mechanical wonders reached so far.

Everybody had been warned well in advance. No one knew, however, when during the night the demon would depart. Occasionally the rhythm of the drums was intensified violently. Perhaps the demon was passing now? Or did the black men know no more than we when it happened? When at last the first grey light of day began to filter in through the windows, we closed the shutters and went to bed for a while.

The white manager was satisfied. Soon the medicine men would pronounce the wooded hill free. At first he would be able to hunt there. A number of buffalo had taken refuge on it – it being in effect a protected area. As disease made it impossible to keep cattle in that part of the country, the natives were forced to rely on hunting to provide them with meat. Buffalo is highly prized game. Naturally the whites had often been tempted to drop an antelope or a buffalo in the forbidden area, but they had conscientiously refrained.

Had they done that, they would have fared as did a gold prospector on the other side of the Sierra Leone boundary, where the black man is still the master. Like many before him, he had gone deep into the jungle in search of gold, though he knew that so far nobody had been able to make a strike of any value. However, this man knew of a place by a little river that seemed to him the right sort of site and even looked promising. It was remote and quite out-of-the-way, and he thought that he would settle there with his few native porters. However, he had neglected the customary precaution of making sure of the local chief's permission. The natives went to him and objected to his

presence. That part of the river was forbidden territory, and no one was allowed to settle there. They explained that they themselves never went there at all. The prospector did not bother his head about them. The chief offered to allow him to settle and dig for gold wherever he liked, only not there at that place which was taboo. The prospector said that he did not believe in superstition. He had no understanding of the gravity of the situation, but stuck to his right to dig for gold where he wished.

It was not long before something happened: his African bearers left him. When he still remained stubborn and continued digging himself, his boy and his cook also vanished. Then at length he began to realize that he was in a fix, and he decided to leave the district. But he found it impossible to get porters. None of the people in the neighbourhood would have anything to do with him. He then tried to send a message to the nearest white District Officer with a request for help, but no one would take it. He had to stay where he was. His provisions came to an end, but the natives stubbornly refused to sell him anything whatever. Had another white man not happened by sheer chance to pass through the district and hear of the prospector's predicament, things might have ended very badly for him. To this day he does not know why he was forbidden that place by the river. It was, however, the monkey people's area and taboo to humans. Some Africans regard the monkeys as an independent race – differing from themselves only as people of a different tribe. All animals, they hold, have their own languages though we do not understand them.

In this case it was the chimpanzees, the human monkeys, whose habitations had to be protected. The chimpanzees are our kin. If you are lucky, you may be

able to see the chimpanzees feasting and dancing just like the Negroes themselves. They assemble in a glade in the forest. Some of them hammer rhythmically with their hands or sticks on fallen tree-trunks; others belabour hollow standing trees which emit a dull booming sound. Meanwhile other chimpanzees leap around in the open space in a sort of dance. Each by himself in his brown fur, with his pale face, eyes shut as in ecstasy. They will all be singing – so the Negroes interpret the noises they make. There will be many chimpanzees there, yet otherwise they never appear in herds.

No white man whom I have met has ever seen the dance festival of the chimpanzees. There is much that the white man has not seen or does not even know about.

The Pole and his fellow countrymen on neighbouring plantations were contemplating a further concession to the Negroes' ideas. What they had planted was not growing properly. The people believed that the homeless demons of the district were avenging themselves by ruining the crops for the newcomers.

The medicine man was the only person who could possibly drive out those evil spirits, and the Poles were in fact considering going to the expense of having a medicine man exorcize them. They hoped that if that were done the people would work better. As long as they believed that the spirits were against things growing there, they would not be bothered to take proper care over planting and cultivation.

Those white men were not superstitious. They were educated men with agricultural training, and they in no way shared the natives' views. But they were practical men and realists; they were feeling their way, and, if they found that there was something in what the medicine men said, then they took their advice.

Among a neighbouring tribe, the Bassa, there were some medicine men who acted as specialists. One was a buffalo doctor who, for a fee, would help to see that you had good luck when out shooting. Once, for the fun of it, the keenest shot among the white men consulted one of these buffalo doctors. He was given certain magical objects in a pouch which he was to take with him, and a certain place indicated where he was to wait for the buffaloes. 'The first buffalo that comes you must not shoot, or things will go wrong. The second you may shoot, but no more.' Such were the doctor's instructions.

The man had not been waiting long at the chosen place before the first buffalo came. It was an angry old bull that rushed, snorting and bellowing, straight at the man. The buffalo is a dangerous brute and it was tempting to shoot; however, the buffalo turned suddenly aside and dashed past him. In its place appeared a cow which fell to the hunter's bullet. More buffalo came, but the man did what the medicine man had said and let them pass. His boys who carried the cow home maintained that the old bull had been the buffalo doctor himself in animal form. Whatever it was, it must have been tough, while the cow was fat and tender. What was probable, thought the hunter, was that the buffalo doctor had been in the rear of the herd, which he had been driving. It was said that when white hunters consulted the buffalo doctor they always had good luck.

But there were other kinds of doctors as well. When snakes were unpleasantly frequent in their visits to the plantation's buildings, a snake doctor had offered to drive them away. He sprinkled powder about the place and painted black medicine on the door posts. The snakes never came back. In similar

fashion an ant doctor had freed one of the plantations from an invasion of these poisonous little creatures. The powder he strewed was perhaps the same as what we now all use – this happened before the war – but it would be interesting to get the recipe for the snake powder.

This was the period of the rains in Liberia and by no means the most suitable season for magic and mystery. In that season it is difficult to get about and the Africans mostly sit indoors. One is perpetually wet. When it isn't pouring, it is drizzling, and the roads are broken up. One has to wade through rivers and streams where the water reaches above the top of rubber boots. If the Africans have thrown a bridge the width of a tree-trunk across some watercourse, it will be under water and you have to make your way across cautiously, step by step, feeling your way with your feet – for in that muddy water you cannot see whether the bridge is still whole or part has been washed away. It is impossible to keep anything dry: everything that is not made of stainless steel rusts; leather and cloths become mouldy, and the dried fish for the native porters rots and gives off an appalling stench. Your safari splashes through the forest in everlasting mud and oppressive heat.

Some days later I came to another Polish plantation, without having seen or experienced anything but the everyday life of the natives, which was all that I had been expecting. Now, curiously enough, a messenger came from the nearby village with an invitation to the two white men to witness a dance that evening.

Dance? But it was raining!

The messenger explained that the rain would stop. The Africans always know what the weather is going to do. It was not the villagers themselves who were going

to dance, but the snake people, a troupe from the Manu, who were there on a visit.

Since the chief had invited us to his village, we had to make a formal entry, and so were to ride, as it is called. There were no horses there; too many animal diseases for that. Riding in that part of the world means being carried in a hammock. The hammock is strung from a frame that rests on the heads of four bearers. The custom is not originally African, but was introduced by the Portuguese who had copied it from the Indians of South America.

Our Negro companions were in a good humour, and no wonder! Pleasures are few and far between during the rainy season in the jungle. The reserve bearers, who had nothing to carry, played on instruments they had brought with them and the bearers themselves sang – somewhat pantingly at times, especially those carrying the stranger who undoubtedly must have been a great chief, because the great are heavy.

It was still raining when we arrived at the village. There was a fire burning in the open palaver house, where instead of walls there was a low parapet on which an audience could sit. When we arrived the fire was being raked over and a flat stone laid over the embers for the guests to warm their feet. Since we were wearing rubber boots and woollen stockings, that was hardly necessary, but we seated ourselves one on either side of the slab leaving room in the middle for the old chief who at that moment came stumping in. He greeted us after the manner of the country by stroking our hands and clicking his fingers, and then sat down with his feet on the stone slab.

After a moment's silence the palaver began. We were the ones who had to start. Our two head boys interpreted our sentiments of gratitude at having been

invited and our delight in being in that village of whose wise and mighty chief we had heard even as far away as on the coast, in the capital. My head boy afterwards confessed that he had improved on my original sentiments and told the chief that the country's black President had especially requested me to convey his greetings to the chief, of whose existence the head of the state, of course, had never even heard.

The chief answered with a long rigmarole which shrank astoundingly in translation. Presumably our interpreter's English did not go very far. The whole thing was merely a greeting of welcome. After that the chief was presented through the head boys with our gifts: from me a shiny shilling, a bundle of tobacco leaves and a piece of gaudy cotton; from the Pole a little bottle of the country's gin. This smells of fusel oil, but at the sight of it the chief grunted with satisfaction; he then presented us in exchange with a hen that was unbelievably scraggy even for African conditions.

That disposed of the formalities and the dance was able to begin. The drums were already thundering in the open space in front of the palaver house. It is only on the frontier between Liberia and the Ivory Coast that they have these dances by the snake people, and it is not often that white men have seen them. I knew that they had some magical significance and also that they made considerable demands on the performers.

The open space was now ringed by a dense throng of Negroes whom excitement rendered motionless and silent. Then it began. A line of men in the usual robes of home-woven native cloth took up position in the open. They were the singers, and formed the background for what was to follow. Beside them kneeled the drummers with their instruments of hollowed-out tree-trunks.

Then suddenly, as though they had shot up out of the ground, three little girls were standing in front of the singers, their faces painted, decked with feather-diadems and strings of beads. Their mouths were half open, their eyes fixed in a stare. Like automatons they folded their hands and forearms across their chests and out again in time with the rhythm of the song and the drums. In front of them trampled the witch doctor, the conductor of the dance, dressed up in a great headpiece of plumes and with rattling fringes of seeds round his wrists and ankles. In either hand he held a short, beautifully ornamented wand, and with these he now and again stroked the girls over their whole bodies. After that he produced the black medicine, a tar-like ointment and smeared a little of it on their lips and breasts.

Then another man came dancing forward, naked except for a gaudy loin-cloth; he too had rattling ornaments at his wrists and ankles that echoed the rhythm of his movements. This was the dancer proper. For a while he danced alone to the inciting song and music, then suddenly he seized one of the girls and danced with her in his arms. He threw her up into the air – and she landed upright on his shoulders and stood there as rigid as a statue.

A new turn began. The girl was now hanging dangling on the man's back with her head downwards. Suddenly he gripped her by the feet and swung her round and round in the air, as though he were throwing the hammer. He let her go – and she flew like a projectile through the air and landed in the arms of the witch doctor.

The dancer seized a second girl. Her too he swung round by the legs. Her body was bent at an angle, with the trunk parallel to the ground. And suddenly she was

standing like a statue on his hips, jutting obliquely out into the air.

After each turn in the dance, the girls were carefully replaced on the mat. Over this they were handled warily, as though they had been of glass, yet but a moment before they had been treated with seeming carelessness. Once back in their place the witch doctor came with his wands, felt their limbs, bent them backwards like clasp-knives, and smeared more black medicine on their mouths. Occasionally he would carry one of them off behind the huts for treatment in private.

So far the performance had been mere acrobatics and nothing out of the ordinary. Now the exciting part was to begin. A heavy wooden mortar, about three feet high, hollowed out of a log, was set on the ground. The witch doctor smeared black medicine on it. The dancer stamped and rattled. Again he danced out with one of the girls, held her by the feet and swung her round level with the ground. Her head passed within a few millimetres of the mortar against which it would have been smashed. Time after time this risky movement was repeated. Then it was the next girl's turn. He swung her downwards between his legs with her head down, so that she almost grazed the edge of the mortar. She turned her back to the mortar and could not see it, yet she avoided it each time. The black spectators watched breathlessly. If the girl hit her head on the heavy block of wood, it would have smashed like a nut shell. It was the same sort of excitement that lays hold of the spectators at our circus, when the acrobats hurl themselves from one trapeze to the other high up under the roof.

Nothing happened to the girls. Always they missed the sharp edges of that heavy piece of wood. The dance continued hour after hour. The two men's bodies

were running with sweat, but the girls were dry and as well painted as before, and they moved stiffly as if they were mechanical dolls.

The excitement increased, and the spectators crowded closer into a solid mass.

The black dancer produced a long knife. His doctor colleague came forward, drew his wand across it and daubed a smear of black medicine on its handle.

The dancer began brandishing the knife at one of the girls as though he were going to throw it at her. And all the time he was stamping out the time with his feet.

He did not throw the knife – that was just a gesture. Then all at once he was holding it out in front of him, pointing obliquely upwards. Suddenly the girl came bounding forward with long leaps, took a jump and flung herself upon the knife which went straight through her slight body. The point of the knife protruded from her back. Breathless silence. Then the man had the knife in his hand and the girl in his arms. Now he was carrying her on his hands with his arms outstretched. She drooped limply over his palms. He laid her down on the mat. The medicine man hurried up with his black ointment and put blobs of it on her chest and back, and mumbled spells. And all at once the girl was on her feet again, gesticulating and singing as before.

The troupe did not repeat the knife dance, but disappeared into the night after we had filled the girls' hands with big pennies and handed bundles of tobacco leaves to the other performers. The girl who had impaled herself on the knife had black smears of medicine on the places where the knife supposedly went in and out.

Did the knife really go through her? Assuredly not.

Later I came across another troupe of these dancers,

and that evening, since I paid for the entertainment, I sat quite close and behind the performers and used a primus lamp as a spot-light. On that occasion one man threw the girl straight at the knife which another held. I could see distinctly that the knife never went through the girl. The whole thing was an expertly executed trick which deceived even white spectators.

In our eyes there is more acrobatics than magic in the dances of these snake people. However, anything that is curious, unusual or that surpasses what the ordinary person is capable of doing, is magic in the primitive person's eyes. The natives believe that the ability to execute these athletic tricks depends not on training, but on the mysterious power that emanates from medicine prepared by supernatural processes. In this case, we have a magical dance which has developed in such a way that the physical prowess has become the essential part. In the rites that will be described later in this book we shall find other tricks intended to frighten or terrify. The secret societies whose spirit permeates all life in Liberia and Sierra Leone often send out troupes of dancers as a sort of live propaganda. Their purpose is to show that the society's magic is able to make the members capable of superhuman accomplishments.

Short as was my stay in Liberia I was able to become acquainted with certain sides of the mysteries of the jungle and very important they were: veneration for one's forefathers and their customs, fear and respect for demons, belief in the powers of the medicine man-witch doctor and in the might of the secret associations. Another group of rites of central importance for Africans is that concerned with fertility, both of crops and people – two things which are often closely linked even in the minds of people higher up the

cultural scale. A Negro girl's greatest wish is to have as many children as possible and she will not hesitate to use any sort of magic in furtherance of this wish.

To the Negro everything in nature has a soul. There are spirits in trees, stones and different objects, while others, reminiscent of the supernatural beings of our own folk lore, live in the forests, lakes and mountains. It is not easy to determine whether these are the spirits of dead persons reborn, as they often are, in trees or animals.

Dangerous demons can be mistaken for evil lost souls which have been unable to find a refuge. It is necessary to find protection from all these beings belonging to another world, to keep them in a good humour or to overpower them when they become aggressive. It is with the relations of the black peoples to the metaphysical world that the rest of this book will deal.

STRANGE COMPANY

SIERRA LEONE, ONCE called the 'white man's grave', appears a pleasant enough place. The southern part of the country, like the coast, is wooded and slightly broken; the vegetation grows sparser towards the north where tall and often curiously formed heights tower towards the skies. The countryside is often picturesque and seldom downright ugly or melancholy. The climate, however, is trying for Europeans, even though now we are far better able to avoid and cure tropical diseases than was the case in the old days. During the long period of the rains it pours day and night, and everything drips with moisture, and yet the heat is oppressive, not least at night. Then comes the dry season, when the wind off the Sahara brings with it masses of fine dust that restricts sight, gets into your ears, eyes and throat and causes inflammation. There are few white people and never have been many.

In Sierra Leone there are still large tracts of virgin bush where a white man seldom sets foot. It is a country where many strange animals live, and which possibly contains undiscovered secrets. If your guide suddenly halts and without reason announces that you can go no farther along that path, you can be sure that he has seen certain secret signs on trees telling him that it is forbidden to go farther. Should he have known? The boundaries of the forbidden area may have been altered, in the same way as we close streets except to one way traffic.

You may have stumbled on 'Bundu-bush', the girls' camp of the secret women's association, which no man

may approach; or you may be at the foot of a hill that is taboo. That hill perhaps is protected so that certain animals may be able to live there, or because it is the abode of a demon. You may even have hit upon the Hill of Predestined Death where the chiefs are buried, and which no one will ascend except on the appointed day of a funeral.

The chief's reign was once determined by fate: when he ascended the throne his right hand was smeared with palm oil, his eyes bandaged, and the palm of his hand pressed against coarse gravel. The number of stones that adhered to his hand showed how many years he might reign. When his time was up, his court physician, the foremost witch doctor of the tribe, gave him a narcotic which made him dazed and apathetic. Slowly slaves carried him up the half-overgrown path to the top of the hill. When the procession arrived there, the witch doctor cut off the chief's head. The body was buried, but the head taken back to the village, as the dead man's successor might require its advice. It is only if he should have fallen ill that the chief avoided death – for he could not be executed when sick. A story is told of one chief who thrice fell ill at the critical period and thus managed to live until he reached a ripe old age. Nowadays however the old customs are falling into disuse and being forgotten. That the Hill of Predestined Death still remains forbidden ground is mostly due to the general fear of the spirits of the dead – but anyway no one has any occasion to go up it.

The secret societies, however, still retain their power and importance, and a white man cannot live long in the interior of Sierra Leone or of Liberia without coming across them in one way or another. If an African did not belong to one such society he would be con-

rl snake-dancers from the Manu in Liberia.

edicine man in official dress:
erra Leone.

Woman and child painted as protection against demons.

Physical exercises form part of the society's courses.

sidered lacking. He would never have any standing or be trusted by his fellows; he would be out of everything. No one would help him if he got into difficulties. Nor would anyone want, or dare, to take as wife a girl who did not belong to the women's society.

My first acquaintance with a secret society was made quite unexpectedly. I had just arrived at the rest house in a village. (In every village there is such a hut intended for the use of white officials and travellers with government recommendations, and it always stands ready, swept and with cloths stretched across to form an inner roof.) This rest house was an especially nice one. It stood on a rise with a lovely view, had an open hall and was connected with the kitchen hut by a covered passage. It was cool and airy, an advantage which mud houses with roofs of palm leaf do have. Cement houses with corrugated iron roofs become as hot as ovens.

Everything had been as usual. The chief had come on his visit preceded by musicians with trumpets of elephant tusks and followed by his staff. We had exchanged presents: he receiving a Swedish sheath-knife and a necklace for his favourite wife, I a hen, rice and some eggs. My boy had carefully examined all our gifts, feeling the scraggy hen and holding the eggs up to the light one by one to see that they were fresh. I could not help feeling that it was not a nice way to treat presents, but in that part of the world it was obviously perfectly suitable; indeed, far from the inspection calling forth comment, it was not without anxiety that the chief's gaze followed the boy while he made it.

I had bathed, taken my daily dose of quinine, eaten my supper, and after sitting for a while on the veranda gone to bed with the intention of rising with the sun. Just as I was on the point of falling asleep a whole

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orchestra of drums started up somewhere nearby. I had hardly got to sleep before it started again. I woke at once and called my boy who came rushing in still half asleep. He belonged to a different tribe, but still knew what it was all about: the Wunde society was holding a feast. I announced that I would dress and go to it, but my boy begged me not to do so. He appeared to be really afraid, and I saw that I would never get him to accompany me and so decided that I would go alone as soon as day began to break. Judging by the sound, the festivities were being held quite close to the rest house.

I knew Wunde was quite a small local society – powerful in the old days, but now on the decline. Its members were summoned to action when a warlike expedition was being prepared, when it was desired to get rid of some member of the tribe or to obtain funds for the elders of the community. Thus Wunde had had military, political and economic functions, if you like to put it that way. Wunde was considered older and more distinguished than the larger, far-flung and international Poro society. Poro is said to have had such great respect for Wunde that on several occasions it had begun a war on Wunde's orders – but that, of course, had been in the old days before the white man had been there to interfere in such matters.

Day was breaking. I did not dare take my moving-picture camera with me, for it was a sizeable one and too large to be hidden. Later I regretted not having done so. I did however put a small camera in my pocket and set out towards the noise.

It was much farther to the place than I had anticipated. The roar from the great drums of hollowed-out tree-trunks was fantastically loud. Eventually I came

across the place, an enclosure with a fence made of woven palm leaves. By moving these aside slightly I was able to watch what was going on inside for a long time without being discovered.

The fence enclosed quite a large square. In the centre burned the big fire which is not allowed to go out while the candidates for initiation into the society are confined there. In one corner of the square stood the musicians, pounding on drums of various kinds, and round the fire little boys were moving, their feet and faces painted white. It was they who were now to win entry into the society. They were alone there with their instructors, elderly men holding sticks and bundles of twigs in their hands. The novices were aged about eight or ten – they are taken quite young.

They were dancing in a row in a crouching position. Then the drums raised the beat and all the boys squatted down on their haunches, placed their arms round their knees and began hopping forwards. Ash and embers were scraped out from the fire. The boys lay on the ground and rolled across the ground through the ash. Some obviously burned themselves, but none was allowed to utter a word of complaint. It was presumably not just a question of hardening them; the embers from the sacred fire were also to purify them.

Then the music paused. The boys seated themselves on the ground. The drums boomed out again and the boys arranged themselves behind the leaders. A couple of these had now armed themselves with tiny shields and one carried a huge ten-foot bow. Others of the men had wooden forks with short handles, rather like old-fashioned hay-forks. This peculiar armament was intended to defend the boys against the aggressors now approaching. In through an opening in the fence danced grown men armed with birches. They entered

as a column of fours, and with their birches they beat the time now against the ground, now against their legs. They were singing, and the sound of it was weird and terrifying. Then they turned and faced the little boys. They rattled their birch-rods, struck them against the ground and came nearer and nearer the line of boys, their attitude more and more threatening. It was obvious that the boys were alarmed. Then suddenly the drums stepped up the rhythm, and the men with the birches sprang forward menacingly. The song now expressed fierce wrath. The fire-men – so they were called – attacked. All at once they were upon the boys and showering blows from their birches upon them. The huge bow, the little shields and the forks only put up a feigned defence. But the boys' punishment was not allowed to last long.

Through some hidden entrance rushed a number of figures. They had crowns of feathers on their heads, garlands of down in their hands and their feet were painted white. With gentle gliding bounds they came leaping toward the boys. They moved so smoothly that you might have taken them for girls, had you not known that this was a male society and that women were not allowed to be present, far less take part in its ceremonies. No, they were youths, these dancing figures, and they represented bird spirits, hence their swooping gliding dance.

Then the fire-men retreated. The protective birds kept between them and the boys. But still the fire-men danced while the sweat ran down their black bodies in streams.

The boys had now undergone the course and the tests that preceded their admission into the society. One of these tests was, and perhaps still is, a trial by poison. Formerly it was not unusual for one of the boys

to die – that was a sign that he was not suitable for the society and so not for this world either. When the leader came to the village with the boys to return them to their parents – from then on they were in their fathers' charge – a jar was thrown to the ground outside the dead boy's hut so that it smashed. Then the parents knew that they would never see their son again.

What I had seen was merely a glimpse of one secret society. In time I was to see more and more. Now, let me relate something of the two largest and most powerful of the societies: the male society, Poro, and the women's society, Bundu, also called Sande, which I encountered in the eastern and southern parts of Sierra Leone.

Poro is the most powerful of all the old male societies extending over the whole country and neighbouring areas. Poro's accumulation of magic, its big medicine, surpasses in supernatural power all others. In the Negroes' conception it is an inexhaustible spring, a constant outpouring of magic.

These magical forces have to be conserved and fostered so that they may continually protect people against demons and all supernatural perils. For that reason the members must also be continually on the watch and follow the instructions of the society. Each mistake or transgression perpetrated can harm the activities of the society and diminish its collection of magical power. Where magic is concerned, the purely formal is always of importance; thus the least departure from ritual is a serious crime against solidarity. If anyone betrayed the least of Poro's secrets that could detract from the effect of spells or rites.

Boys have to be brought up believing in Poro's power and the adult men live according to its laws.

Poro unites not only the men within a tribe, but far beyond its boundaries – over almost the whole of Sierra Leone and Liberia to French Guinea and the Ivory Coast. It is a power to be reckoned with. The spiritual and social life of a number of important tribes is largely based on that society.

Poro's members have not only duties to Poro as an association, but also to every other man who belongs to it and is thus part of the whole. Solidarity is strictly maintained. A member of Poro can everywhere count on help and support. If bad luck should befall him when he is away from home where he knows no one, he has only to apply to a Poro brother and he will at once be received hospitably and helped. Poro's members are always there with advice if it is needed. If a member suffers a hurt or injustice, he can apply to the society which will immediately help him. The tribe's whole life is permeated with Poro's influence. Even if power formally resides with the chief, yet he will undertake nothing that could be against Poro. The council of the elders would not dare support the chief if he were to suggest anything that conflicted with ancient usage. Poro is conservative. It is said to be there in order to preserve the traditions of the tribe, and it keeps careful watch to see that they are maintained, whether they be profane or religious.

They consider that only Poro has the possibilities and the knowledge necessary to see that the life of the tribe is guided along the right paths to a happy future. All their forefathers' knowledge, wisdom and understanding of life is preserved within the society. By means of the mysterious ceremonies performed at their secret meetings Poro is in communication with the ancestral spirits and receives advice from them. If there is any threat of war, pestilence or disaster, Poro

can foresee it and avert the danger with its strong magic.

Poro has known how to maintain its prestige. It is a jealous guardian of its interests, and no member is permitted to abuse his membership by using it in any way for his own advantage. The society is cleverly and well organized and care has been taken to see that no coteries are formed. If necessary, Poro will strike hard and implacably, and always effectively. Its aim is the unity of the tribe and the community of its members. There is no doubt that Poro's activities have been of great importance in promoting the welfare of African communities.

Some Africans assert that the society came into being in the following manner.

Once long, long ago one very wise chief succeeded in uniting all the little groups of the Mendi tribe. They were glad to submit to his authority for his decisions and orders were most excellent. When he suddenly died the elders of the tribe were put in a great quandary, for they were afraid that his whole work would collapse. They decided to keep his death secret and succeeded in finding a man who was so like the dead chief that he could pass for him. This man was made to swear that he would uphold the chief's traditions and to do nothing to betray the fact of his death. The same oath was taken by all who were in the know. That was the start of Poro, which soon had power over all the Mendi people. In time almost all the men of the tribe became members.

In the society there is an inner circle of men initiated in the basic secrets, and a lesser grade of those awaiting their turn to be promoted to the circle of the wholly initiated. Last come all the other members, among them the boys who have just recently been admitted.

The strict obligation on its members to observe secrecy is a great source of Poro's strength. Anyone entering the society is from the very first sworn to secrecy – and he is silent. This is a point where the Negroes consider that white people are not to be relied on. If two or three white men have learned of a matter, then it will soon be common knowledge; that is their opinion.

It is only one of the leaders of Poro who can relieve a member from his obligation to observe secrecy about even a minor detail.

And now for the secrets of Poro – such as we know them from the various investigations that have been made.

IN THE PORO JUNGLE

He who wishes to be a member of Poro must submit himself unconditionally and unreservedly. No one is forced to seek admission, but in the past, and still in the more primitive areas, all must be members in their own interests.

A man who is not a member of Poro is not considered to be a complete person and can never enjoy esteem. He cannot possibly assume public duties and is no use either as chief or member of the council. It is also very rare for a native to remain outside Poro unless he is a Christian or a Moslem, when he would not be permitted, nor indeed wish, to join such a society.

No one, however, can be received into Poro without preparation. Candidates have to undergo a period of preparation, a real course, and this is held in the jungle. Thus education and instruction are by no means lacking in the Negro society. Poro looks after that, and it is a hard school through which those seeking admission have to pass.

Originally these courses were held at long intervals, every seven or eight years, but now they are usually held more frequently, every third or fourth year. When the interval is long, the ages of those taking part naturally vary considerably. These jungle courses are also held in a different place on each occasion.

Fees have to be paid for the courses so the age at which a boy seeks admission into Poro depends also on his father's economic situation. Some begin at the age of seven or eight; other fathers let their children

wait another five or six years. That would seem the more sensible age, for the privations that have to be endured during the course might well be enough to break a small boy.

Admission is possible at any age, but naturally all fathers wish to get their sons in when they are still boys.

So the day comes when the boys set off for the camp in the forest. They are accompanied by drummers and all the inhabitants of the village. The women and children, however, are not allowed to go farther than the outskirts of the village; there they halt and wave farewell to the boys whom they will not see again for months. The young boys are thus removed altogether from the influence of their parents and home for the time that their training lasts.

When they reach the enclosure where they are to live for some considerable time, they have to remove their few garments. Throughout the entire course, in fact, they must go stark naked and sleep on the ground. This is to be regarded as part of the hardening process. Pleasant it certainly is not, not even in a tropical climate.

The fence of the enclosure is made of posts, hurdles and palm leaves, and is so high that no one can see over it. There is but the one entrance through it, and this is sometimes provided with a roof of palm leaves. The boys' huts are inside arranged in a semicircle and in front of them is an open space carefully cleared and swept, where the actual instruction takes place. Sometimes the enclosure is so hidden with vegetation that you do not discover it until you are almost upon it. The site chosen for it is always as remote as possible, so as to make it easier to obtain that isolation from external influences which is considered necessary.

The first thing that happens when the boys, naked

and anxious, are lined up in front of their teacher, is that they must take a solemn oath of secrecy. They must swear not to disclose a single word about Poro and its secrets to any woman or girl, or man who is not a member, and not to give away anything that might harm Poro. Finally they have to swear that always and everywhere they will follow the instructions of the leader of the society and live and act in accordance with its spirit.

Then follows a strange rite. Each of the boys must drink a mysterious brew; they are then told that that medicine will bring death to any who does not keep silent. The medicine never loses its power, and always its action on the body will be the same. If any of them break his oath of secrecy, he will fall down dead no matter how many years have passed.

The boys now have to be freed from the impurity of the outer world which still attaches to them. They have to be purified by means of a ritual bath and must step down one by one into a stream where they have water poured over them by two of the leader's assistants: first by the one standing downstream from the boy. That water is considered unclean. After that the boy is douched with pure water from upstream by the one standing above him.

To be able to take part in a course the boys have to be circumcised. That operation however does not constitute any essential part of the Poro rites. Most of the boys are already circumcised; this is customarily done around the age of ten. If there should be any who have not previously been circumcised this is done now, though without any special ceremony. Those who are to have it done are made to lie for several hours in a stream so as to numb them and make them insensible before being cut by a witch doctor.

The first day in the camp has been rather trying on the boys' nerves. They are far away from their own village, they have had to swear an oath which has made a deep impression on them, they have a dangerous magic drink inside them – a brew that can be turned into deadly poison. The bath is not the end of the day's proceedings. There is still something to come – and the worst.

The boys are lined up and are ordered to stand absolutely motionless. Darkness begins to fall. They know that something is about to happen.

A life outside of Poro, they are told, is scarcely worth living. He who is not a member wanders about in a darkness. It is only through Poro that you realize what it is that you have to live for. He who wishes to become a member of Poro must say good-bye to life as he has lived it hitherto and be born afresh. He must die and come to life again. And it is that which is going to happen to them.

Now a mysterious being comes moving towards them. The forest demon, the society's foremost mask, is approaching. He has staring eyes and bushy eyebrows, huge jaws like a crocodile in which his teeth shine red with blood. He is bearded like an old man and he has horns and feathers on his head and a shapeless figure – a cloak of fibres that has no resemblance to anything human. The boys have never seen such a being before, sinister and at the same time majestic. They tremble but dare neither move nor utter a sound.

Slowly, swaying and gliding, the demon comes towards them – moving even though he has neither arms or legs. The boys have to stand there a long time. Finally, when it is evident that they are on the point of losing consciousness, a mysterious, lulling music begins,

made by oblong wooden plates which are swung through the air behind the fence, an instrument that seems to be a basic one in magic all over the world. One after the other the boys are seized by the assistants and laid on the ground in front of the masked figure. Then the first is lifted and placed between the demon's jaws. They close over him. The demon has swallowed him. He is taken out again and laid on one side. Swiftly the men scratch the Poro tattoo mark on his back.

Gradually the half-conscious novices recover their senses. They feel convinced that the demon made an end of them, but that Poro roused them to new life.

The demon mask has vanished.

The mask personifies both the demon Poroyafa and the old chief who is said once upon a time to have founded Poro.

The reborn boys are now left in peace for a day or two. Each morning the leader and his assistants examine the tattoo wounds. They must not heal quickly, else there will be no light-coloured scars, so they are kept open with vegetable juices. If any become inflamed, the patients have to drink a special decoction and a compress of herbs is put on the wounds. The scars of the tattooing must be distinct, but it is also desirable that they heal correctly.

The boys in the camp are to all intents and purposes dead to the outside world during their period of instruction. Their female relatives believe that the forest demon has swallowed them. Their fathers naturally know better. They may even be allowed on occasion to visit their sons in the camp.

If one of them becomes seriously ill or dies, the father is summoned. The body is buried in the enclosure. If a father dies the son is allowed to leave the jungle and

attend one part of the funeral ritual in which women and children are not allowed to take part. He is not allowed to be present at the funeral of a female relative, and as often as not he will not even be informed of the death. No boy may ever leave the camp alone and without the knowledge of his teacher. He has to forget the outside world for a long time.

The boys' training begins as soon as their tattoo wounds have healed. Its purpose is not just to submit the participants to tests of endurance, but is a very well thought out and executed system of education. Practical instruction begins with the simplest accomplishments. Most of the boys will already know some of them, having helped their fathers or elder brothers, and will already, when very small, have aped their elders' occupations in their games.

Now, they are first taught to rip up palm leaves and prepare bast fibres. After that they learn to twist cord and rope, weave baskets and mats, and make nets. When they have all acquired the desired degree of proficiency in these accomplishments, they go on to more difficult crafts, in particular wood-carving. Those who have no bent for this need only learn to make spoons and other household utensils of the simplest kind. If anyone shows an aptitude for wood-carving, then he is taken in hand and given more difficult things to do, and it is possible to develop considerable skill even during the course.

They are not content, however, to teach the novices to make objects, they must also be able to use them. The teacher takes them to the river so that they can try out the nets they have made and learn to catch as many fish as possible in the shortest possible time. Such fish are cooked and afterwards eaten. If any of the boys has botched his bit of the net so that it does

not function as it should, then he has to abstain from the fish and fast for that day.

Gradually they learn how to make and set out bownets. Nor is the curriculum confined to the manufacture and use of household implements and tools. Physical prowess is included. Swimming races, jumping and climbing are practised industriously. One and all must be agile and daring.

The boys are hardened in various ways. At daybreak they must bathe in a cold river, and in the chilly mornings of the dry season that is anything but pleasant. During the rains they are often made to go out into the forest to gather this or that with the rain lashing their naked bodies. All complaint is forbidden. Nor is hunting neglected. First, they are allowed to make and use the simpler snares and traps for smaller animals. In time they learn to catch the larger game.

On this part of the Guinea coast the men weave, and boys must thus acquaint themselves with that craft. Their practical training ends with house building. The boys have to build and completely equip a hut. Throughout the time it takes to do this they are not allowed to speak to each other; they are even forbidden to cough, sneeze or clear their throats. That is a sort of test of steadfastness, a thing that used to be more common in the old days than it is now.

Sometimes the instruction is extended to include bridging as well, though it is said to be only when there is an especially able course that the boys are entrusted with such work. They begin with a simple bridge of poles and then go on to such more difficult constructions as suspension bridges of lianas. Those engaged on this are allowed to devote themselves exclusively to the work and are relieved of ordinary camp duties.

Instruction given in the camp does not merely in-

clude practical subjects, but theoretical subjects also play a large part in it. The novices must all acquire a certain education in order to be useful members of society.

Poro pays great attention to character building. From the very start the boys must learn to control themselves and to suppress their own wishes. They must submit to the discipline, that sinking of identity in the community, which is demanded of mature youths who are worthy of becoming members. The purpose of everything is to teach the individual to subordinate himself to Poro, to leave aside all consideration of self and personal advantage, and to identify himself with the interests of the whole. The tribe means everything – the individual nothing.

An important subject is the art of behaviour. The boys must know how to behave when associating with elder and esteemed persons and with eminent personages. In conjunction with this they learn the laws and regulations of the tribe and also what are the duties of a man towards his family and the community. The rights of the individual in relation to the chief and his superiors is also made clear. As well they are taught the history of the tribe. Noteworthy events are described in song and story, as are famous deeds and martial encounters with other tribes. The pupils must learn these so that they can retell them without forgetting anything. They must also be able to recount fairy stories and fables about animals. Singing, music and dancing are all included in the curriculum. All learn to play the different drums that are used there, but those who prove especially musical are given further instruction on other instruments. Their literary education comes from learning legends and tribal traditions.

The masks of Poro represent demons and are seldom so human in appearance as this one.

Stilt dancer with accompanist and spectators.

These courses in the jungle really do include everything that a native needs to know and should be able to do. Sexual knowledge is part of it. Instruction in this goes very straight to the point. It is considered that obscurity or hints on this subject could easily give rise to an unhealthy exercising of the imagination over the relations between the sexes.

Thus the boys acquire not only knowledge but are taught the art of living.

When the course has been in progress for some time the teachers will know which, if any, of the pupils show a bent for that most important of all subjects, magic. They are asked if they will agree to remain in the camp longer than the others for additional training. It is seldom any refuse – there is no compulsion, but it is a great honour to be selected for a higher course. The chosen pupils are transferred to a separate class. To begin with they have to learn under the guidance of an experienced medicine man to recognize all the plants that are used for medicine. Those merely aspiring to be medicine men's assistants can stop at this point. The course continues then with instruction in the preparation of various medicines and also – this is the very peak – of dangerous poisons. Pupils are also given an insight into magic and counter-magic. Finally, when there is nothing hidden from them, they are allowed to learn some of the religious-magical secrets which give the Poro society its power.

Naturally the novices have to leave the enclosure now and again, for example, when they are to fish, gather wild fruits or set traps. They always do so in charge of the teachers. The boys have to look straight in front of them the whole time. If you look at the ground you risk becoming short-sighted, while a rash glance at the sky can make you temporarily blind. It is

even worse if you look to the side. That is followed by certain death, unless the leader washes the culprit with a certain magical decoction.

It is seldom that the teachers need to give physical punishment, but if they do there are no half measures. All work is performed communally. Each individual becomes a part of a community, and what each does is done for them all, not for himself. During theoretical instruction it is also impressed on the boys that the general good must always be put before their own wishes. If a member of Poro acts against this, he can draw down upon himself the displeasure of the forest demon and risks being swept off the face of the earth. Poro novices, as well as the other members, are fully aware that this threat hovers over them.

Certain exercises are used to try and efface the remnants of personal individuality or unorthodox ideas; these begin with monotonous movements of the body and conclude with mystical rites. The prime factor here is the dance, a dance that is anything but ecstatic; rather suggestive in its uniformity.

Inside the enclosure there is a place levelled for dancing, preferably where there is a shady Bombax tree growing. In this tree live the spirits of the departed. The tree in the Poro enclosure will house fine, good spirits who in their lifetime had played important parts in the community. The voices of their ancestors, the whirring, droning bull-roarers, summon them to dance. Round the tree the novices dance slowly with bowed heads. Now the booming wooden drums have taken over the accompaniment. Without a pause, slow and uniform the dance continues hour after hour. In the end the novices are only semi-conscious, treading mechanically in the same everlasting rhythm. They are no longer on the earth – they have become

merged in the unity of the mighty forest demon and feel spiritually uplifted.

The dance is pre-eminent as a means of influencing demons, of taming them. Its significance is neither æsthetic nor erotic, but purely magical. In primitive religion the dance is an act of worship.

DEMONS IN DISGUISE

THE AFRICANS REGARD man as a weak vessel inherently incapable by his own efforts of creating a tolerable existence for himself against the supernatural dangers with which he is threatened. Divorced from the society of others he cannot in the long run manage, but goes under. This danger is reduced by all combining together as a tribe. To do this renders danger less imminent, but does not necessarily avert it altogether. Nor is it enough for the worldly forces to unite and offer common resistance. If you are not to stand impotent before the hard fate to which mankind is subjected, and if you are to reach an enduring state of peace and happiness, you must have the assistance of supernatural powers and above all the help of the souls of your ancestors. These are beings of a higher order than people, more experienced and wiser than those who dwell on earth. The alliance maintains constant communication with them and thereby increases the powers of the living.

The ancestral cult plays an important part in the secret societies. The past links up with the present. It is first and foremost those of the ancestors who distinguished themselves in one way or another during their lives who are chosen. Although the ordinary ancestral soul is considered superior to the living, the souls of the eminent dead are in a class by themselves. Their power can on occasion be as great as that of the demons.

However powerful the spirits of the dead may be, they still cannot by themselves give mankind sufficient

protection. So spirits and demons must be induced to collaborate. Having the assistance of the souls of his ancestors and of spirits and demons may enable the African to protect himself against any supernatural danger whatever. These ideas are realized in the African associations. There the demons appear even in personification, as masked figures. The spirits enter into these masks and are thus themselves present though the members of the association know that those masks are disguises which people have made. To a certain extent this can be compared to the popular attitude of pious Catholics who pray by the picture of a saint knowing perfectly well that it is the work of human hands, yet nevertheless thinking of the saint in its presence. The masks of the secret societies have their origin in similar ideas.

The demon has taken physical shape. It is not always quite clear what sort of spirit a mask represents. In the world of African fantasy the spirits of the dead or forefathers are often confused with demons. While the mask of an ancestor is given human features, the demon mask is fashioned according to the Africans' idea of how such a being should look.

Even the masks representing the dead are stylized in order to express the supernatural element. The freer rein the artist gives to his imagination, the less resemblance the mask has to a human being. There are various kinds of mask with more or less local shapes.

There is a certain resemblance to a human being in the front view of the Landa mask which represents the Poro's demon who is descended from the mysterious founder of the society. Its huge crocodile-like jaws which swallow the novices on their first evening are, however, purely demonic, as is the body with its covering of fibre which makes it look like a haystack.

One mask which has nothing human about it is the Yubai, which one might describe as a wide crinoline of bast fibre topped with an erection of skin and cloth reminiscent of a crown. It looks rather like a church bell, having neither limbs nor a proper head.

Yubai makes a mysterious and peculiar impression as it sails along in the dance with sudden turns and swings. Sometimes it moves slowly, sometimes spins round suddenly like a top. It appears mysterious and fantastic just because there is nothing human about it, nor anything like an animal either. To the natives it is a sort of oracle, whose every movement has a symbolic significance. It would appear to be good-natured, for it is not feared, merely respected. The man inside the mask has a job to tax anyone's strength. Hour after hour he must dance, and it must be hot and stifling in that 'haystack'. Before he puts on the outfit he swallows a narcotic drink in the medicine man's hut which lends him strength, and during pauses in the dance an assistant will pass him in under his fibre envelope a bowl containing the same fortifying medicine.

There is another masked figure, the Ngatagodi, also entirely covered with bast fibre so that it appears to lack limbs, though the fibres are not extended in the shape of a crinoline but hang straight down. Over his head the disguised person wears a garment shaped like a mitre and ornamented on either side, but without human features. The mask always appears when the society's council has a meeting. It just stands there – it being sufficient that it should be present. Its emanation of magical power does its work.

This is the mask which will appear in village after village about the time of the boys' jungle course. It performs no ritual whatever, but merely shows itself as a reminder that the society has supernatural powers

at its disposal. Its message is then mainly addressed to the mothers who are to let the boys go from them.

The women all believe that the masks possess supernatural powers, and their appearance terrifies the weaker sex. The same is true of the ritual dances.

Here and there appears a masked figure called Yawei, a gorilla-like denizen of the forest. His arms are elongated with bamboo sticks and bast. Everybody has a great respect for the demon's arms which are thought able to reach all over the site of the festivities. The women, especially, fear him. They believe that his magical powers can kill a person on the spot, and it is a considerable time before any will dare enter an area where he has danced, and they long avoid the paths by which he made his way.

There are a number of ritual precepts concerning masks. They have a very definite order of precedence, and there are precise rules governing the number of medicine men and assistants who shall attend them and those which may or may not perform together. Some cannot stand each other's presence, but antagonisms can be neutralized if magical measures are taken. A weaker mask cannot appear alongside a stronger one without taking hurt. There are tribes which only have masks with weak magic. This, people think, must make the members of the tribe very anxious. Despite the magical medicine by means of which powers can be increased for the time being and despite the ingenious system in which the masks are arranged, there still remain grounds for fearing that they do not give all the protection intended. People with the weak masks must feel inferior and easily get anxious on that account. They run the risk of being outwitted by others by reason of inadequate preparedness.

There remains one important figure still to name: the

stilt-dancer. Strange as it may seem, in West Africa the stilt-dancer generally has a religious-magical character. His art is handed down from father to son.

The stilt-dancer wears a skirt of bast fibre and tufts of it hide the join between feet and stilts. Otherwise he is decked out with a patchwork of skins. His stilts are six feet or more in height and lift him high above the heads of the crowd as he strides along. First he just walks about taking long strides; then he begins making sudden turns and great leaps and he ends by performing a rhythmical dance and in between times does acrobatics, such as hanging between the stilts with his head down. It is a long dance, and it really does call for great endurance, for the rhythm grows faster and faster, and faster and faster goes the drum accompanying it on its resonant stand of thin metal. He will dance for half an hour, rest a few minutes, and then on he goes again.

He stays for several days in each village and gives his performances hour after hour. It is an exhausting profession. Always he must be in form and able to perform. His duties too are important, for he is one of those who must help to enhance the reputation of the men's society in the eyes of the public. In many places in West Africa his art is considered magical and supernatural.

The society is always trying to show, among other things, what supernatural accomplishments its magical medicine can give, and to do this arranges performances by specially trained and seemingly indefatigable dancers. These are decked out in gala dress, but do not generally wear masks. We have already met a similar sort of troupe, that of the so-called snake-dancers in Liberia.

There are, however, some dances which are entirely

profane, yet their motive gives them a sort of connection with Poro. Such a one is the pantomime common in certain parts of the country, which represents a Poro candidate's farewell to his family when he has to go off into the jungle. The main character is a youth, then there are three girls representing the departing one's family, and a few other women to provide the music which comes from large rattles of calabash hanging in a net, an instrument which is a monopoly of the women. The performers are not masked, nor do they wear any special dress. There are other pantomimes which are not profane but magical-religious in character, and in these there must always be a masked demon figure present. These are often accompanied by a great deal of show and splendour and call for many performers. They are a kind of dramatic performance with proper parts.

The central character in these is the mighty demon Gbini, ruler of the forest where he holds the lives of men and animals in his hands. The masked figure representing Gbini is covered with bast fibre, and his head hidden by a heavy mask of skin, cloth and cowry shells. In front the masked figure wears an apron of leopard skin with decorative patches. He is attended by a medicine man who is not masked, but magnificently garbed. He has rattles attached to his legs and in either hand holds a cloth dipped in a magic medicine which is considered very strengthening. Six other somewhat more simply dressed men complete the company. All masks, even that of Gbini, are accompanied by an attendant in everyday dress whose sole duty is to see that nothing goes wrong with the masking. He is equipped with a broom-shaped bundle of fibre with which he must repair the masked figure's bast cape, should that be required.

When the dance is to begin the masked figure makes a ceremonial entry surrounded by the six dancers. Behind them come two drummers. The medicine man walks by himself with his own drummer and has his own place nearby where he thereafter dances entirely by himself. It is this dance which is to tame the unruly demon. It is not always the same mime which the masked figure and the six men round him now perform. New turns are occasionally invented, but most are traditional. With threatening movements and horrible growls and roars, the demon makes to attack the spectators while the dancers fling themselves between him and them, try to stop him and entice him into following them for a few steps, continually retreating and approaching again. The demon makes rushes at them, strikes them with his long arms of bast, but gradually he is driven back. It is, however, first and foremost through the ritual dance of the medicine man being performed a short distance away that the demon is held in check, and so the medicine man prances away stubbornly and energetically. When the demon grows more savage and, roaring, strikes the dancers to the ground, the medicine man increases his speed and twirls round and round giddily. His feet move swiftly, his body is contorted in all directions, his head wobbles. The medicine man, however, may not introduce anything new into his dance, but must stick to the ritual. After all, all magic is bound by definite rules.

When the demon at last disappears into the wood and frees himself from his hot and uncomfortable costume, the medicine man must still continue dancing before he can lay aside his garb and rest.

The struggle of the dancers with the demon is intended to represent how the spirit of nature is tamed

by the power of the society, represented by the medicine man and the other performers.

In certain districts in the east the people make figures of the forest spirit, Hanawai, who has a number of features in common with the Gbini mask, though Hanawai is not masked. He has, however, the same head and decorative patches of skin on the body. In either hand he holds twisting, twining snakes to symbolize his power over the dangers of nature.

The demons of the Poro society are very naturally males. But down in the south a female demon sometimes appears as companion to the one who swallows the Poro novices. She is called Nyangbai and has no fibre cape, but is entirely covered in beautifully worked skins of monkey and leopard. The figure has broad shoulders, but the face is placed on the chest, being a wooden mask, beautifully stylized and painted, and having human features.

In pictures or in museums these demon masks do not make much of an impression. You must see them in their right setting in the tropical night before you can understand the effect they have on the native spectator. Out there the scenery is perfect for mystery and mysticism. The moon rises. The magic drums rumble softly. The villagers huddle into an expectant fearful crowd. Great fires are lit, and while the rolling of the drums grows louder and louder the demons come gliding into view – Landa with his staring eyes and crocodile jaws red with blood, Yubai, a haystack moving slowly and undulating like the grey swell of ocean, Ngafagodi, a lumbering ogre with a leopard-spotted skin. Now they are creeping softly around in the flickering firelight, now flying in rings like bats, now sinking together on the ground to rest. The music roars incessantly, singing rises towards the night sky. All

about are the round, grey huts with their pointed roofs, and above a tall black hill hangs the moon, white and gleaming.

That is how you should make acquaintance with the demons, in the forest close to a native village, with firelight flickering, and the acrid smell of the Negro in your nostrils, and round about a tightly packed throng of half terrified spectators tense with excitement, while the sounds of the forest filter through the beating of the drums and the singing. In such circumstances even the sceptical white man is gradually captivated by the mood of the hour, becomes almost ready to believe that the demons really have stepped in among the jungle people for a night.

THE SECRET CAMPS OF THE BUNDU GIRLS

PORO OF COURSE is the men's society circumscribing their entire spiritual life. The women are kept outside altogether. Among primitive peoples it is quite usual for the women to be excluded from magical rites. In this part of the world, however, they have formed a secret society of their own from which the men are excluded; this is called Bundu or Sande. If the women did not have Bundu, their own association, they would have no voice in the affairs of the community at all. The women's society gives the weaker sex its social position.

Bundu's secrets are just as well kept as those of Poro. In Bundu the women are closely united in a very strictly closed circle. Like Poro, Bundu seeks to influence the young and admits the girls after they have taken certain courses and tests.

When a girl starts developing into a woman she is taken by her mother to the place, cut off from the outer world, where the society is to attend to her upbringing. The time considered necessary for the course varies with the different tribes from six months to two years. The interval between courses also varies. A Poro and a Bundu course (that is one for boys and one for girls) are never held in the same district at the same time. It is considered that one year ought to pass before a course for boys is begun in an area where there has just been one for girls, and vice versa. Naturally, the same enclosures are never used for Poro and Bundu courses, even though they come one after the other.

The Bundu enclosure is often quite near the village, but the men are strictly forbidden even to approach it. If they do so, they can cause themselves considerable harm, for the punishment inflicted on them from above is elephantiasis of the scrotum. In the remote districts of Sierra Leone the sick came to me in crowds, having heard that I was a white doctor and naturally assuming that I was a physician. I gave them what medicine and treatment I could. All those who had elephantiasis in that fatal spot admitted that some time or other they had tried to peep inside the forbidden camp of the Bundu.

Spying by the men is considered an act inimical to society, for it can ruin the effect of the course so that the girls do not acquire the ability to give birth to their children in the correct manner.

The Africans' peculiar ideas about the magic of procreation and birth are the result of their speculating about such things. Whatever her age, a girl who has not won entry into Bundu is considered of no importance in continuing the family. Of course she has within her the necessary organs for bearing children, but not till they have been developed through the ritual of the women's society can she give birth successfully and bear numerous children. Without Bundu's magic a woman would remain barren all her life.

There is a mystical connection between birth-magic and circumcision.

In Bundu this rite is an essential condition of acceptance; it comprises the actual dedication of the girl-candidates, and is performed when they enter *kpanguma*, the enclosure where the course is held. The leader performs the operation which is one of partial or complete excision of the clitoris. The purpose of the opera-

tion is to enhance their ability to have children and thereby ensure a numerous brood.

When I asked why the operation was performed, some said that it was to prevent unhealthy sensuality, others that it made coition more attractive to the man because the circumcised woman has to twist and turn a lot to obtain satisfaction. It is probable that this circumcision of the girls is mere imitation of the operation performed on the boys, and the explanation for it a later invention.

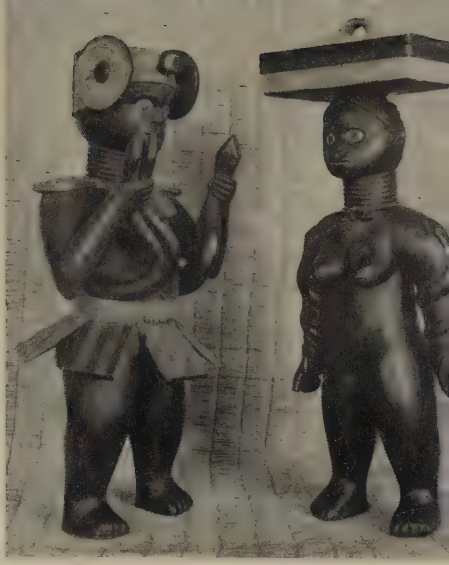
Instruction begins after circumcision. It is given by women of experience under the direction of one of the society's most trusted members, and it is as thorough as that given to the boys in Poro. The girls are made to practise all the practical accomplishments likely to be useful to them in life. It goes without saying that cooking is one of the most important subjects; yet instruction is not confined to lessons on the way to prepare food, but starts at the beginning with the wild herbs, roots and fruits which can be used in the kitchen. The girls are constantly being taken out into the forest and must learn to recognize all the edible vegetables, gather them and take them back to the camp to provide variety in the otherwise monotonous diet of the natives. As soon as a girl has learned the fundamentals of the art of cooking, she is able to go on and start preparing special delicacies and the more uncommon dishes. At times during the rains there are lean periods, and the instructresses teach the girls how best to overcome their difficulties.

All agriculture is the business of the women, except for the heavier work of clearing bush which the men do. It is thus only natural that the girls are trained as farmers. Plantations are made near the camp and looked after by the initiates.

Also in the curriculum are cleaning and spinning of cotton, and the use of plants for dyeing. The art of weaving is in the hands of the men, as has already been said. The girls also learn to make cosmetics. In their camp, as in the Poro house, those with special gifts receive special instruction. One such subject is the manufacture of fish-nets. This is done in a peculiar way, being knotted over narrow ribs which are then pulled out from the mesh. In the process of manufacture the whole thing looks like a basket. It is only especially able pupils who are taught this craft. The same is true of pottery, which is considered to call for special gifts. Those who have an aptitude for it are carefully trained in the art. In these jungle courses, whether for boys or girls, any kind of gift is always fostered. Each individual ought always to be equipped to serve the community to the best of his ability. That, too, is the idea behind the very thorough and detailed insight into sexual life which the girls are given, for without this they cannot be good bearers of children and good mothers. Their most important duty in life is to give the tribe many children, and that being so, it is held necessary to instruct them in the intimate relations between the sexes. The subject is treated with great frankness and realism, yet in such a way as not to give rise to unhealthy excitement.

During the course there are held secret ceremonies at which the girls sing ballads and songs. Some of these laud man's procreative ability and the girls call upon the spirits to give them husbands who possess this to the highest degree. In an eloquent refrain the chorus extols the very act of coition and the burden of the song is emphasized at suitable places by gesture. The girls do this but not in any way as an expression of sensual passion. The purpose of it all is motherhood;

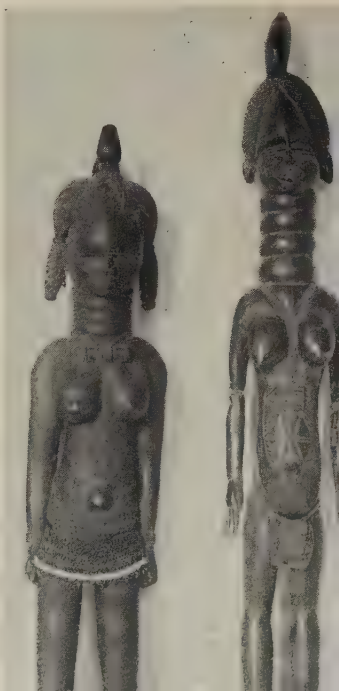
Carved Bundu masks, one with a double head.



The forest demon Haniwai with female companion.

Carved Landa demon mask.

Female statues used in the cult of the Bundu society.



Bundu women are often expert with the only instrument allowed their sex: the rattle.

that is the main thing and what to them appears the highest at which they can aim. The words have to be outspoken, but it is not shameful in their eyes, and however unambiguous the gestures may be, they do not appear obscene.

In the Poro camps the boys are taught the history of their tribe, its legends and animal fables. In Bundu, the girls go in for singing and dancing instead. And in doing so talent is fostered, as it always is.

The girls begin with simple ballads and short songs. The words and melody and rhythm are practised over and over again until they are absolutely sure of them and can sing them as solos or in chorus.

Especially gifted girls are allowed to go in for more independent and creative work, such as a new variant of a song, new words for a tune or an entirely new composition of words and music. If such songs win the teachers' approbation, the poetess-composer is taken in hand for further training. Melody is always of less importance than rhythm, and so they try to arouse a sense of rhythm in the pupils. A wrong note in a tune is not considered heinous, but you may not sin against the rhythm. The women have to be content with just the one musical instrument, the task of which it is to give out the rhythm. This is the great calabash rattle. It is contained in a net in the meshes of which dried seeds are stuck. When using the instrument they take it in one hand by the 'neck' and lay hold of the top of the net with the other, the rattling sound being produced by the fruit-seeds striking against the gourd. With this instrument they produce a skilful and most effective accompaniment to their songs. They often prefer part songs which sometimes describe events that happened long ago and sometimes are improvisations.

There is a song-leader leading it all with the others joining in as a choir or refrain-soloists. The rhythm is given most cunningly by the rattles. Naturally, they are not all equally adept, but in the Bundu camp one and all learn to use a rattle with tolerable skill.

The directress of a course makes it a point of honour to discover as many virtuosi of their rattling instrument as she can, in the same way as she wants to see good results from the instruction in singing and dancing. It must also be remembered that the dance with musical accompaniment is also intended to ward off attack by demons during this period which is one of great risk, for it is then that the girls are considered most susceptible.

The task of the Bundu course, after all, is to prepare the girls for motherhood. According to the native conception magical forces must of necessity be very largely employed in producing a miracle such as the creation of new life. Bundu alone knows how to conduct the forces in the right direction. A girl who has not submitted to Bundu-initiation cannot count on the benevolence or support of the spirits and will be dogged by disaster. No one feels any sympathy for such an outcast.

But, of course, it does happen that a girl gets with child without having gone through a Bundu course. It may have been years since the last one was held. It would be disastrous were an uninitiated girl to give birth to a child and all go well, for that would just encourage people to doubt the necessity for the Bundu courses. Thus, if an uninitiated girl is found to be pregnant, her mother at once hurries off to the elders of the society who have the girl sent to a course, if one is being held within reasonable distance, and there she is subjected to the usual rites. If this solution is not

possible, the girl is taken off into the forest where a private course of rapid instruction is given her and during this she is washed with a special ointment which is supposed to purify her. Her seducer has to pay a fine to Bundu. If a man wants an uninitiated girl for his wife, she too will be sent to a course, sometimes for as short a time as a couple of months or so, in order that her marriage should not be deferred too long. It is true that in certain parts of the country there is a loosening of morals, but on the whole where the Bundu society exists its rules are strictly kept.

There are no native midwives, and the medicine men do not concern themselves with childbed. The only assistance a woman can receive at such a time comes from Bundu which does everything possible to help its members then.

According to the laws of Bundu it is reprehensible to have intercourse with a pregnant woman, for that can have a prejudicial effect on the child. Even the man is held to take physical harm from such intercourse. The men have, if possible, an even greater respect for Bundu than the women have for Poro. The husband of a woman who has given birth is not allowed to enter her hut until the leader of Bundu gives him permission.

Transgression of the strict rules of Bundu can, among other things, cause difficulties in childbirth, and thus may be a source of danger to every woman. Infidelity in marriage is one such offence. Confession of this must be made to the leader of Bundu immediately the first pangs of childbirth begin. If this is done magic means can be employed in greater and greater strength if it looks as though the birth is taking an unfortunate turn. The confession is regarded as confidential and not allowed to go beyond Bundu, so that

the husband never learns anything about it. Thus the women stick together even over such secrets. If anyone were to tell tales she would be punished most severely.

When a Bundu leader dies the women officiate at the funeral lamenting, dancing with Bundu masks, and conversing with the soul of the dead woman, while the men have to stand silent and apart. The Bundu masks dance not only at the site of the grave but also in the village in front of the Bundu leader's hut and that of every member. This takes the greater part of the day.

In northern Sierra Leone the Bundu courses have degenerated and the girls there are no longer allowed to learn anything. They are just taken out into the forest to be circumcised, and then have to spend a short time in a hut where they are by no means isolated, but allowed to receive visits even from men. Mostly, however, the segregation is strictly observed and the courses of instruction are given with great zeal and thoroughness.

Before going on to tell of the festivities with which the courses conclude, let me first say something of the more important masks and sculptures. The Bundu masks are not like those of Poro. They are carved in wood, black in colour and consist of stylized cupular heads which are clamped over that of the wearer. They have a high lined forehead and the face is broad at the top and narrowing at the bottom with a very small mouth. The female head is thus transformed until it no longer appears earthly, but has a mystical look.

The hair is mostly very elaborately arranged, and the neck consists of a number of ring-like folds, which is traditionally considered a sign of beauty. To the neck of the mask is attached a cape of bast fibre dyed dark

blue with indigo. If it does not quite reach to the ground the masked woman wears a sort of trouser-cum-footgear, the purpose of which is to prevent any of her dark skin being seen. The idea is always that there should be nothing to make the spectator suspect that there might be an ordinary person inside the disguise.

On a number of the masks the large head has on top of it a long neck ending in a miniature head. This double head appears to be used particularly in those parts where Bundu and ancestral worship are strongest. That is to say, in southern Sierra Leone. The double masks symbolize the souls of the ancestors.

Those who carve masks for Bundu must have supernatural inspiration if they are to do the work as it should be done. Art is knowing, so they say, but that is not sufficient when making demon masks. The magicians are at great pains to explain to people that the artists' purely human talent has to be reinforced with the emanations from a magical centre of power. In other words, he must take some of their medicine which is made for that purpose. Without magical help no one can create a work representing a supernatural being. The richer the flow of magic the stronger the inspiration. If the inspiration is weak, it is because the stream of magic was insufficient. The result then is a work which is not perfect enough for a supernatural being. The demon which is to be brought to life and personified could not make use of such a mask-harbour. It could not contain all his power and wonderful qualities. Magical medicine is supposed to put the artist in such a frame of mind that he himself, helped by the world of the demons, puts all his knowledge and ability into providing the most powerful spirit with a perfect home.

These wood carvers do not only make masks but

statuettes as well, such as those I have already mentioned of the forest spirit, Hanawai, with the bundles of snakes in his hands. Sometimes they also carve images of ancestors, but it is first and foremost female sculptures which are included in the Bundu society's arsenal.

These black female statuettes are all stylized, tall narrow naked figures. We recognize the folds at the neck, the careful and elaborate way of doing the hair, and the tattooing scars – all of which are typical of African ancestral pictures where external likenesses are seldom sought after, but all such distinguishing marks as these are reproduced in every detail. The statues act as oracles, the leader addresses questions to them while holding them in her hand, and they answer by inclining themselves in this direction or that.

There are many occasions when the ancestors are consulted; for example, when a new field is to be cultivated. On the field itself offerings are made of maize and magical leaves, either in bowls or on stands. The very first ears of the corn are the property of the ancestors and are cut off with a knife not used before and offered to them.

Ancestor worship and demon cult are thus part of the ritual of the secret societies, and not least of that of the women's Bundu. Bundu has a daughter society, Zazei, which is exclusively devoted to ancestor worship. Its objective is to win the goodwill of the departed by showing them deference and veneration. The meetings of this society take place in the profoundest secrecy in some remote locality on the river which is held to be a favourite resort of the dead. The women who go there are all painted white. They call upon the dead and beg them to deign to accept the gifts and offerings which are then produced. In doing

this they are allowed to use or at least to add their own wording, whereas with other magical rights no departure from a fixed formula is ever allowed. Magic after all is mechanical. The offerings are set down on a spot that has been well brushed and tidied. Each offering is announced in a loud voice so that the spirits, who have meanwhile assembled round the place, shall not be in any doubt of what it is they are getting, and by whom it is given.

No mortal who happened to come across such offerings would dare touch them. To do so would entail sickness and a painful death.

Through their connections with the spirits of the departed the members of the society have the gift of being able to foresee future disasters, and to avoid disease.

Eventually the time comes when the girls are to be released. A week or so before the final exodus from the Bundu camp the leader orders a ritual bath. After that the girls are permitted at certain times to leave the enclosure and visit their mothers in the village. They may not, however, speak with members of the opposite sex, still less be in the company of men. Before they are finally allowed home they must submit to a number of tests, a sort of examination to show that they have benefited by their instruction. They have to harvest, prepare foodstuffs, cook meals, wash clothes, spin, etc. They are given a parcel containing a quantity of roots and bits of plants, and this they have to open and give the names of the various plants and what they are used for. Singing and dancing are practised industriously.

On the morning of the day of their release the girls march off in procession to the river for yet another

ritual bath. After that they return to the camp, paint themselves white and get themselves up for the festivities. Round their shoulders and bosom they have wide-meshed net, and a bandoleer of leopards' teeth and cowry shells, the symbols of freedom and fertility. Round their waists they have a sash of fibre plaits which look like short pegs and tongues of the same material hang over their faces, so that they are in actual fact masked and unrecognizable. The get-up may vary, but that, I believe, is the accepted garb. Curiously enough this same covering of the face and painting the body white is also to be found in the initiation of girls among the Basuto in far away South Africa. The girls are taken in procession to the village preceded by the demon masks.

To the dull thunder of the drums the girls and masks march in, while the instructresses sit on stools and direct the proceedings. All are painted with white, a very usual proceeding in Africa when there is any need for protection against supernatural danger. However, the white is soon swept away by the sweat which starts to pour down the girls' bodies as soon as the dance begins. The dances which they have practised in the jungle camp continue throughout the day and, after a short pause, go on during the night to the music of drums and rattles. The girls' mothers stand among the spectators, mark time by clapping their hands, and encourage the dancers. Towards dawn, when the dance has lasted almost a day and a night, the drumming stops, the rhythmical tramping of feet and the dry rattle of calabash gourds die away. The girls have become real women. One and all are initiated in Bundu and ready for marriage.

OTHER SOCIETIES AND INITIATION RITES

WE HAVE NOW seen how the largest of the secret societies, the notorious Poro and Bundu, work and what their objectives are. These are by no means so dark and awful as rumour often paints them among Europeans. There are certain societies which practise ritual murder, but they are in the process of being abolished. I shall come back to them later.

It is true that there is much jungle magic woven into the activities of Poro and Bundu, even that the attitude of these societies is mainly based on respect for the magical powers of the society's medicine. None the less their objective is first and foremost that of preserving the traditions of the tribe and keeping its members together. It is, too, these societies which attend to the education of the young people, and this is in many respects admirably well organized, both in practical and theoretical subjects. It must be said that the jungle marriage course is much better as a practical preparation for life in an African village than the school of the white man.

It is regrettable that the educational system of the secret society has not attracted the attention it deserves of those Europeans who staff or organize schools for the Africans. Nor is it even sufficiently well known. There have been all sorts of rumours about it, mostly unreliable, and thus the white man's work of enlightenment has been based on the pattern of his home country, which is by no means always suitable for the Negroes. An educated Liberian, Dr Bleyden, has

taken up cudgels in defence of the native courses with which he maintains the European system compares unfavourably. He points out that the teachers in the tropical jungle schools are either widows or married women with a practical knowledge both of housekeeping and of marriage, while the European schoolmistresses are unmarried and their knowledge mere theory. Whatever instruction in sex may be like in the jungle schools, it is adapted to the native mentality and much better than no instruction at all.

The social stability of the Africans of the hinterland is high; far higher than that of those who have come under European influence. These latter are torn up by their roots and have not yet become properly readjusted. They find themselves stranded between two civilizations, the primitive one of their tribe, and the modern one of the white man. The system according to which they used to live is destroyed and nothing put in its place.

The primitive culture is often so complicated that even a scientist requires years to study it properly. It ought to be possible to preserve some of the best and most valuable elements of a tribe's culture. It ought to be possible to link the new on to the tribe's own customs and traditions. There is, in fact, a growing tendency nowadays to build afresh on old ground, for our civilization cannot be suitable in all respects for the African. It goes without saying that the African has a national individuality to preserve which varies from tribe to tribe. Most of the old native handicrafts are valuable, and it should be possible to sell these products for good prices in Europe. But for the most part they reap not the slightest benefit from the banal work they are given to do in the white man's schools. Unfortunately the white teachers do not themselves always

possess any deep understanding of their own culture. Christianity, which in Africa is propagated by many different and unfortunately competing sects, is after all but one aspect of the white man's civilization.

Discipline at the jungle courses is strict both for novices and initiates. The absorption of the individual by the community, the insignificance of the private person as opposed to the whole is rather reminiscent of the views inculcated in totalitarian states.

Secret societies are common among primitive peoples, but it is not nearly so usual to find them absorbing the entire spiritual life of their members as they do here. It has already been said how Bundu has given the women a position in the community that they would not otherwise have had. As a result of the men and women belonging to different societies the sexes are spiritually isolated, and the community of interest between husband and wife tends to be restricted to their sexual life and the practical details of the household. Neither is allowed to reveal anything to the other, for that would harm or weaken the magical power of their society.

This system is not universal throughout Africa. For instance, among the tribes of Angola which I visited on my last expedition there are no actual secret societies, but they do have initiation rites for the boys who are isolated in camps in the forest. Here the introductory and most important rite is that of circumcision. In Sierra Leone this was not part of the ritual, although all candidates had to be circumcised in much the same way as baptism is necessary for confirmation with us. In Angola the boys are taken to the camp in the forest called Mukanda where they will spend several months. Within the first few days they are circumcised by one of the elder men, a specialist who is often summoned

from a considerable distance away, whose emblem is a pole on which a cock's head is impaled. He does not belong to any ordinary category of medicine men but he just performs the operation, and is not allowed to show himself in the camp again. Here, too, the boys have to sleep naked on the bare ground and are never allowed to wash. Masked demon figures also make their appearance. When the boys have recovered from the circumcision, one of the practical tasks they are taught is how to make such masks. It is, however, dancing which they practise most, and for this they put on bast skirts very similar to those worn in Sierra Leone. They must not allow themselves to be seen by women, or have any contact with them. The masks are there to protect them against female influence. Their release from the jungle camp is celebrated with dances, feasting and the appearance of masked figures. In one of the tribes the women are not allowed to see the masks, and in another tribe all the masks have to be burnt after the festivities at the end of the course. With the Kikongo, at the end-of-course festivities the novices have to dance for hours on end on all fours, being painted and masked like animals. This is a form of hunting magic.

Similar customs are to be found on the other side of the frontier in Northern Rhodesia. All boys have to be circumcised. For this purpose enclosures are built in the forest, and then masked spirits make their entrance and announce that all is ready. The women must then hide themselves, for it is considered shameful for them to see anything at all of the Mukanda ceremonies. Occasionally masked dancers are engaged from Angola where they are considered especially clever at the ritual Mokishi mask dance. The masked figures represent the spirits of ancestors who were adept at

circumcision. The operation itself is difficult and can harm a boy for life. During the months when the boys are in camp they fetch their food from an agreed place to which it is brought by the women. When they are released they are carried out on their parents' backs, painted white and clothed with tufts of leaves. The mothers then come forward and try to recognize their sons. After this the boys may no longer be with their mothers, but have to be by themselves and associate with men and not with women.

There are a number of rules which the boys have to observe while in camp. Every morning at breakfast they must, while reciting an incantation, throw a little porridge and some ash from the fire towards the east. And every evening at supper they do the same, but towards the west.

The girls are initiated individually. The girl has to go covered with a piece of cloth and on all fours to a certain place in the forest where some elder women prepare her physically for marriage. She has to crawl there every day for months. She is not of age, but already promised, is accounted married, but does not yet live with her husband whom she only joins after the preparation in the jungle. This takes place with magical rites and an act of symbolical coition. For a week or two yet the bridal pair have to submit to strange formalities until the so-called chisungu period is at an end and the bride considered definitively initiated in her vocation.

In southern Nigeria among the people of the Niger delta initiation of the girls also takes place. This again takes the form of courses which prepare them for marriage. In these a dominant part is played by ancestor- and fertility-cults. Each class, comprising all those born within a period of three years, go through

the course at the same time. There they receive instruction from selected elder women in all that they need to know for the task of marriage ahead of them, for there are a number of sexual taboos and restrictions which they must know.

Having gone through the jungle course the girls return to the homes of their parents, and there they model a sort of phallic figure, usually conical in shape, called eku. Every year at the time when work on the fields begins, every girl who has been initiated in the female mysteries must make and set up some such figures, otherwise she will have no children. Some of these eku are quite simple affairs, resembling the conical clay stands on which they place their cooking pots. (Stone is usually hard to come by in these delta areas.) The eku are set up along the edge of the road.

In certain areas the figures are well worked, painted in different colours, and topped by something that is supposed to resemble the girls' coiffure.

Together with their teachers the girls go in procession to place their sculptures on an earthen platform which is got ready beforehand and has a roof over it. They carry the sculptures on their heads. Those who attended earlier courses but are still not married also take part. Their images are larger than those of the others. Some very small old men are appointed to be eku's slaves. Sometimes the eku are put up round a tree. Food and drink is sacrificed to them, and they sing and dance before them.

Each of the girls also searches out a termite heap and in it digs a hole. Inside there will be an empty space with a floor looking like a mountain landscape in miniature. This the girl digs out and then tries to carry it home whole. She will have as many children as there are 'mountain peaks'. Breathlessly she counts them. If

any peak gets broken off on the way home, it is a sign that the child in question will be stillborn or will not long survive.

There is a special juju house to which a girl goes immediately before marriage. There she dips her hand in medicine and with it paints the symbol and her own body. That makes her fertile.

With the Ibo it is strictly forbidden for men and women to lie together in the open, no matter whether they are married or not. Intercourse in the plots they cultivate is particularly dangerous, for that incenses the goddess of the soil to the utmost and both parties would die were they not almost invariably killed by their exasperated fellows. Such behaviour might affect the harvest by causing the crops to fail. There is a sort of lath-bed for use indoors. Otherwise a mat is all that lies between the couple and the ground. A woman is forbidden to sit on the bare ground; if there isn't a log or a stone nearby, she must stand. If desire comes upon a couple in the forest, coition may take place if the woman bends her body in a right-angle and rests her head against the trunk of a tree, while the man gets close up behind her. Anyway, all intercourse is forbidden during the day or by artificial light. Whenever intercourse takes place the woman must be dressed and bedecked as the rules prescribe. Though the young girls go about naked, a husband may never see his wife's private parts. To attempt to do so is cause for divorce. In official language a wife may 'demand to be freed of her marriage by reason of the husband's attempt to peep'.

In the so-called Mbari temples there are all sorts of clay figures representing scenes from life. These always include some forbidden acts, probably to demonstrate what should not be done.

A woman must not prepare food for her husband if she has just come from her lover.

In Sierra Leone, Poro and Bundu are the only two societies which have attained wide recognition. The others have as a rule remained local, even though they may act as subsidiaries to the larger ones. Among these are those mainly devoted to physical training. Stilt-dancing and wrestling have a magical significance in West Africa. There also exist traces of a society whose function was to see that the sexual precepts were observed.

The society most concerned with physical accomplishments after the style of the snake-troupes of Liberia is called Kofung. Those wishing to join it have to submit to certain tests of their steadfastness. The last and most difficult test sounds perfectly simple. The candidates are taken into the ceremonial hut by the medicine man and there must lie down flat on the earthen floor. They are not allowed to move: not a finger may quiver, not a muscle in the face may twitch. The medicine man and his assistants keep trying to alarm them, but they must remain unmoved whatever happens: they must not allow themselves to be perturbed by a sudden shrill cry or by a stick suddenly whacking down on the ground right beside their head. He who gives a start or makes an unpremeditated movement is rejected, and must start taking the tests all over again.

At the end of this test the candidates are told to relax, to lie as though dead – they *are* really dead, they are told, but are to be revived to a new life just as in Poro. After they have been lying there a long time, they do in fact become half conscious. The medicine man then has recourse to the society's great magic medicine and rouses them to life again. Thus they owe

A bed from Southern Nigeria, and on it sacrificial vessels and jars and a stool supporting an image of Ikenga holding an axe and a head trophy.

Sculptures from a Mbari temple, one of them representing an elephant swallowing a child.

The young of the Ibo are not embarrassed with clothes.

The interior of a juju house with the skulls of animals which have been sacrificed there.

their lives to the society. Each member of Kofung has his own guardian spirit whom he can summon by repeating a certain incantation seven times. The ability to do this gives the members of Kofung great self-confidence, and that itself increases their physical abilities. They are, however, given systematic training at the society's meetings. At the same time they have to learn how to prepare various decoctions which are held to give the body unimagined powers. On one occasion an interested European managed to get hold of one of the society's secret potions which was supposed to be taken in conjunction with some dried leaves – according to what was said, it was supposed to be merely a dangerous poison if taken neat. The man was rash enough to take the medicine and spent a sleepless night during which he could neither lie down nor sit quietly, but had to walk about continuously. Both his nerves and muscles were taut and tense, he said. What that drink consisted of is not known, however. The secret training which the members of Kofung undergo not only makes them strong, but also very lithe, so that, for example, they can free themselves from ropes or handcuffs if they are fettered. Their physical prowess makes a deep impression on outsiders and is considered to come from the strength emanated by the society's fetish.

It is believed that the Kofung men are able to pass through locked doors, even through thick walls. They are said to be able to transform themselves into various animals and in that guise commit acts of violence without being discovered. Because of this presumably unjustified fear, neither chief nor the authorities have wished the society to develop and it has been suppressed; it has got a bad name and is on the point of disappearing, perhaps only to grow fashionable again one day.

The other societies which are dying out are really offshoots of Bundu. Yassi is – or was – such a daughter society with a meeting-house right in the village. This house was painted white with round splodges, just as were the people who took part in the rites. It was called the spotted society. It again was devoted to ancestor worship. Another society, Prumoi, had the duty of seeing that people observed the rule advocated by Bundu that coition should not take place in the open. Originally this society was exclusively female, but in time men were also allowed to join. Then the society degenerated. Its meetings were held out in the forest, and, instead of seeing that people observed Bundu's rule of chastity in the open, their behaviour was most unbridled and the very fundamental rule of the society was broken. They considered that they had been given a sort of dispensation by the goddess of the soil. 'If I do it, it's all right' is no uncommon attitude.

Sexual orgies take place in other societies elsewhere in Africa, for example in Northern Rhodesia, where even the strict rules about the forbidden degrees have been set aside. Here it is undoubtedly a question of old fertility rites surviving – and if there is truth in the tales one hears of what happens at markets in certain remote country parts, traces of such rites still persist in Europe.

WILD ANIMAL SOCIETIES

CERTAIN SOCIETIES DEVOTE themselves to the cult of dangerous animals, against which the natives hope to protect themselves by keeping them in a good humour and providing them with refuges where they are not molested.

The baboon society, which seems confined to the Temne tribe in Sierra Leone, comprises a comparatively small number of members. Its task is to watch over the rights of the baboons: that is to say, to see that the brutes are unmolested in their reserved areas. All offences are immediately reported to the society, and in most cases the punishment is death. The culprit seldom escapes his doom. He is tracked down and found wherever he may be. We are not dealing here with either ritual murder or cannibalism, but merely with the infliction of punishment decreed. People stand in great awe of the baboon societies and usually do not dare even to speak of their existence, but deny all knowledge of them.

It is not only to the Christian European that the African refuses to reveal anything about his magic or secret societies; he is just as secretive towards the Mohammedans, whose religion is continually gaining ground in Africa. A Mohammedan can never become a member of a secret society.

There is a certain resemblance between the baboon society and the crocodile society. Both are concerned with creatures who have to be respected and protected. According to the crocodile society, the crocodile is one of those animals in which a demon has taken up

residence – not a benevolent demon, of course, but an evil one. That makes it all the more important to keep on good terms with it and to see that nothing is done to incense it. Besides, it is a very sensible precaution to forbid people to visit those parts of the river banks which are the favourite resorts of crocodiles. The protection of crocodiles and their resorts, however, is not the society's only aim. According to the ideas of primitive man it is possible by magical means and the use of mysterious medicines both to ward off the attacks of demons and also to divert them against others, against your enemies. In other words it is possible to make evil and dangerous demons serve your ends. That is what the crocodile society does. In this grim ritual with its horrifying details they use a medicine which is prepared by the society's magicians at some secret place in the great forest. Apparently, it may consist of different things, sometimes of herbs, or of bits of wood, or of stones, but its power and its magic it acquires from the ritual with which it is invested. However, the medicine deteriorates in the course of time and then has to be renewed. The best medium for reinforcing and resuscitating medicine is human blood. This means that someone has to be sacrificed in order that the medicine may be prepared. There is no question of cannibalism here either; the sacred blood may be used only for the medicine fetish.

The crocodile society is reputed to have employed the following method of obtaining blood for the purpose. Beneath a large canoe was lashed a small one in which a man with a knife lay hidden. The canoe passed near a place where women and children were bathing and washing. As it passed a child was seized by the submerged man, pulled below the surface and killed.

That, of course, is medicine murder. To kill a person to use in reviving some great medicine is no crime. According to the society's ideas it is a duty. One must die for the welfare of all. In other tribes too, such as the Kissi in the eastern corner of the country, human life was of little significance when required for ritual purposes; previously it was undoubtedly the same throughout Africa. A ritual murder is regarded as the most effective medium for averting threatened disaster and natural catastrophes. When the rains are late and the harvest is endangered; when the fishing is a failure or an epidemic breaks out, then the magical remedies and spells of the medicine men often fail. Food, drink and animals are then sacrificed to the demon who is held to be causing the misfortunes, and if they too bring no result, there remains but the last resort – human sacrifice.

That ritual murder is rare these days in Sierra Leone is due to the strict watch maintained by the authorities. The places where the sacrifices used to be made are still invested with great respect and the natives never set foot upon them. Nor will they tell the white man where these places lie.

The Africans will tell you now that the people who knew where the old sacrificial places lay are all dead. An Austrian, Eberl-Elber, who managed to learn quite a lot about the secret societies, was lucky enough to stumble upon a sacrificial site in the jungle by the River Makona, at a point where it goes foaming and thundering along between high cliff walls. There in the depths lives the dread demon Yigidi, to whom in the old days a human being used to be sacrificed every year, being hurled down from the cliffs into the seething depths. The place has remained taboo.

In sacrificial huts or in places in the forest where

gifts are laid out for the demons you will occasionally see certain skulls hung up which would point to humans having been sacrificed.

The notorious leopard society has objects similar to those of the crocodile society. Officially the leopard society has been abolished in Sierra Leone and, perhaps, in Liberia as well. It long had the reputation of being cannibalistic, but that appears to have been true only up to a point. It probably never held any real cannibal meals; but when a human being was sacrificed as part of the ritual each member had to consume a tiny piece of the victim's flesh in order that the members should be united in brotherhood and to ensure their loyalty.

The south coast of Sierra Leone with its river arms and mangrove swamps seems to have been the centre of the society's activities. In such a place it was easy to assemble by canoe. The crocodile or alligator society was regarded as a branch of the leopard society.

The leopard society would seem to be a later offshoot of the much older Borfima society, so called after its 'great medicine'. This consisted of a calabash filled with all sorts of magical substances, sealed with pitch and blood, and decorated with cowrie shells and red seeds. Only a very respected person, some great chief, might have charge of such a magical fetish. Apart from the fact that the fetish gives the society its power and protects its members, it is the thing by which they all swear not to betray the secrets of the society. In the old days before there were any white authorities it was not difficult to obtain victims for the ritual feasts. In those days feuds and the taking of captives were common, and the fate awaiting some of the prisoners was to be sacrificed. Borfima had to be strengthened with human fat and other parts of a freshly killed

person in order not to lose its power. After the colonial administration began dispensing justice it became more difficult to maintain the strength of the Borfima medicine, yet it had to be done.

To-day it is said if the guardians of Borfima find it needs strengthening, either because something important is impending or because it is a long time since it was renewed, discreet summons are sent to the elders to meet on a certain day and time under a certain tree in order to discuss certain business. This secret meeting takes place deep in the jungle, and at it they decide whom the victim is to be – usually an old man or woman or a sickly child, in other words someone whose disappearance would be no great loss to the community, nor likely to occasion any great stir. It sometimes happens that the victim is handed over voluntarily, the family being bribed.

The authorities once arrested two men who were suspected of having taken a child for sacrifice. An old crone gave evidence that the child was her grandchild and had been sickly. The two men had come and asked to be given the child for a sacrifice, but the old woman had refused.

'They offered me five shillings – again I refused. Then they said they would give a case of gin as well, so my heart weakened and I agreed, but they broke their promise. I got the case of gin, but not the money. So you can hang them now but make them pay me my five shillings first!'

It must have been exceptional for compensation to have been paid in that way. Mostly it took place in the greatest secrecy.

The victim has been selected, the night fixed. The men who are to do the deed assemble dressed in leopard skins with carved wooden paws so as to leave

the right tracks. In their hands they hold sharp iron instruments imitating the brute's claws. Should the victim unexpectedly escape, his wounds would show that he had been set upon by leopards.

Arrangements are now made for the victim to be sent on an errand or lured out into the forest where the leopard men have hidden, while the rest of the villagers are warned by special whistlings which fills everybody with dread. The victim is attacked in the darkness, the men growling and roaring like leopards, and dragged off to a place previously prepared. There the body is opened in accordance with the ritual and the entrails studied for the omens to be read there. The kidney fat is most carefully preserved, because for some reason or another, it is that which is the best ointment for the Borfima. It is used to renew old ones or for making new ones. The flesh on one leg or arm is cut into tiny pieces which are wrapped in leaves and sent by runner to all absent members. The system of distribution functions excellently and by daybreak all will have received their leaf-parcel. Only senders and recipients would know what they contained.

The old Borfima fetish would be strengthened, or the new one swiftly prepared with all due regard to the magical regulations. When a fresh Borfima fetish is to be delivered, the person receiving it must sit down on the ground facing the medicine man who made it. Between them lies the little Borfima calabash.

'Where is my Borfima?' asks the recipient.

'I have no Borfima,' replies the medicine man.

Then the recipient picks up the Borfima.

'What have you taken?' asks the medicine man.

'Nothing,' replies the other.

'Of course,' says the medicine man, 'I had nothing, so how could you have taken anything.'

No one has seen a Borfima; no one has made one, no one taken one. No transaction has taken place. That is how you must treat a Borfima and never admit that you have had anything to do with it.

Among those who have been condemned and hanged for taking part in leopard murders have been chiefs, Christians with school education, even lay workers and preachers, as the records of their trials show. It is obvious that the power and attraction of the society has been considerable.

Leopard-men and leopard societies are widespread in Africa and have been known and described in the Congo, while medicine murder for the preparation of powerful medicines is quite usual in South Africa.

JUJU – THE TRANSCENDENTAL

TO MOVE NOW to Southern Nigeria, with whose peoples I also made acquaintance, is to alter the picture in several respects. The peoples we are visiting are those of the Niger delta and their neighbours, the strange Ibo, and the Jekri, Bini and others.

The delta is a cheerless place. Woods that drip with moisture cover the low stretches of mud lying between its innumerable natural channels, while swamps of mangrove with ghostly aerial roots line the banks. The country beyond the delta is also forested, slightly broken, but more monotonous and gloomy than that of Sierra Leone. Ocean-going ships can make their way up some of the arms of the delta, and such giants, surrounded by swarms of native canoes, occasionally sweep past a mighty tree whose roots have scarcely any hold on the mud and anchor beneath branches in which monkeys play.

The atmosphere is oppressively hot and damp. In the forest region beyond there is, however, one period of the year when no rain falls, and then there is a shortage of water. According to the natives this is due to the thirsty dry spirits drinking up all the moisture. During this dry period the Harmattan, wind of the desert, blows even here. The water in the streams and pools evaporates, the blazing sun bakes the ground hard and makes it crack into a thousand fissures. It is not a pleasant country to live in.

Here we encounter other forms of jungle mysticism. Ancestor worship and fertility rites dominate, and, though the secret societies here do not have the same

significance or purpose as in Sierra Leone, they have to a certain extent idolized their forefathers and the cult ceremonies are conducted by priests. Bloody sacrifice of men and animals along with cannibal meals occurred in the ritual of which they are essential parts. In other words ritual murder was incorporated in the system and linked with cannibalism.

The mighty delta of the Niger has never been explored in detail. The country to the west of it is inhabited by comparatively advanced and peaceable peoples which have built large states and purely Negro cities with populations of hundreds of thousands; but in the forest country to the east of the river the people are split up in a number of small groups, some of them, it is true, united in so-called kingdoms. Their civilization is what we usually describe by that rather old-fashioned expression: savage. Nakedness – all unmarried women go about stark naked – head-hunting, human sacrifice and cannibalism are among the customs which used to be considered as justifying the name savage. The civilization of the Ibo, however, is very complicated and quite specialized. Magic and religion play a dominant part, and they have powerful religious cults. The savage customs enumerated above have the sanction of religion. The territory of the Ibo was not pacified by the British until just before and during the first World War, and it was planned to be accomplished by purely peaceful means. Such 'peaceful penetration' has, however, often proved impossible of accomplishment. The old is still not altogether gone for good and the authorities are worried by occasional cases of reversion to the old ancestral ways. We have some good descriptions of these from the early pioneer days, and in what follows I shall on occasion quote from them.

Although right up until our day the Ibo had little or as good as no acquaintance with European civilization, they had contact with slave-traders from the delta region and themselves engaged in the trade. Their religion – the Ibo were and are a very religious people – comprised human sacrifice and slavery. The British have tried of course to put an end to these customs, and to head-hunting and dealing in slaves, but they have encountered considerable resistance, since the Ibo originally regarded these as useful and legitimate customs. The priests used to have great power, for they ruled the kings and chiefs. A chief could himself also be priest. Not infrequently they exploited the natives' blind faith to their own advantage.

In the north of the Ibo country lies the town of Nri, which claims to be the mother town of the Ibo. All the people of Nri are priests. If you need a priest, all you have to do is to send for a man from Nri. The men of Nri and the first-born son of all Ibo families perform priestly functions.

By the coast live the Aro, in whose veins lighter blood is thought to flow. They earned themselves notoriety on account both of their business ways and their cult. Their chief cult place was in a gorge in Aro Chuku, where was the dread 'long juju'. The white man uses the word 'juju' to signify all sorts of things connected with the people's religion: fetishes, amulets, temples, sacred trees, their magic power itself, etc. This 'long juju' was an oracle who interpreted dreams, foretold the future and decided whether an accused person was guilty or not. The oracle's remuneration was in slaves who had to be sacrificed – otherwise it would not answer. Human blood is the most magical of all fluids – human sacrifices were numerous. But the

priests did a considerable trade in slaves, for they did not sacrifice all who were presented to the shrine, but kept some to sell and deceived the faithful by letting some goat's blood flow.

This cult place was attacked and destroyed by the British in 1901, but similar activities were continued elsewhere and it is alleged that human sacrifices still occasionally occur. The human sacrifice was followed by a cannibal meal which was thus a ritual ceremony. This ritual cannibalism, however, degenerated, perhaps owing to the lack of meat – it being impossible to keep cattle there because of sleeping sickness and the tsetse fly. Stories are told of human flesh being sold openly on the market and, when a white person was killed, which seldom happened, his remains being distributed among the neighbouring villages so that cannibalistic feasts could be held everywhere. It is even said that once such a meal was held in a village where a troop of soldiers had halted – this right under the noses of the white men who were still oblivious of their companion's tragic death. The victim was a white doctor who had lost himself in the jungle, and the legend goes that his skull is still hanging in some local juju house.

It was difficult for the administrators to combat cannibalism, since it was for a long time not an offence in native law. Now it has died out, more because of the work of enlightenment being done than as a result of the British Colonial laws that have been gradually introduced.

Nor can slaves now be dealt in openly. To stop the traffic altogether is, however, not easy. There are agents who take the daughters of poor parents to the coast where they are easily sold as wives and fetch higher bride prices than at home – and where they are

also better off materially. Nigerians have always treated their domestic slaves very well, and most of these would not wish to be freed. Even those who had been kidnapped so that they might be sold into slavery – abduction was also common here – often settled down happily after a short time. Such slaves mostly came from poor homes and went to rich houses. In the olden days there was always the risk that a slave might have to follow his master to the grave, and though this might occasionally have been the case slaves for such ritual were usually bought specially for the purpose.

The white men have also prevented the continual petty warfare which used to be waged between the tribes. The forest country east of the Niger has of old been split up into a number of locally-governed small communities. Now all is quiet in the land of the Ibo, apart from the almost yearly local resistance to the collection of taxes. The population is also increasing fast – perhaps too fast – while mortality is being reduced by the mellowing of custom and the introduction of hygiene. The Ibo country is very thickly populated, and when an official has tens of thousands of people to watch over, as is usually the case – he naturally cannot discover everything, and now and again things take place which ought not to happen. The Ibo still retain many of their customs and ways of sacrificing except for human sacrifice, thus there are still the places of sacrifice with their painted walls and sacred trees, and the blood of goats and hens still flows freely. The chiefs remain, and latterly their power has increased, though it is now controlled. No one compels the people to wear clothes, and swarms of naked young girls walk the roads along which cars now drive. The villages consist of a number of groups

of huts, so-called compounds, each of which is surrounded by a mud wall, and the older houses which the white men built also have mud walls and roofs of palm leaves, though many have now been replaced by houses of cement with roofs of corrugated iron, materials which are more resistant and hygienic, but also much hotter.

It should perhaps be mentioned that the most important foodstuffs are yams, dried fish and palm oil which the natives press from the flesh of the oil palm nut. This oil is also sold to the white man and is an important export. The kernels are sold whole and from them palm kernel oil is manufactured in Europe. One great difficulty for the white man has been, and still is, that it is impossible to keep cattle and that meat is therefore hard to come by. This, as has already been pointed out, has contributed to make the cannibal meals popular.

There are many kinds of juju house amongst the Ibo and their neighbours. They range from small simple sheds by the water's edge where sacrifices are made to the water spirits, to large temples of sacrifice with painted walls and carved wooden partitions and Mbari houses filled with sculptures. Many juju houses are considered sanctuaries where a hunted person can find refuge, and it often happens that he or she stays there for the rest of his or her life and looks after the juju. These sacrificial temples are usually small and situated in a walled enclosure where a sacred tree grows. The wall is painted with patterns or figures, though it can also be decorated with reliefs. The little structure of the temple itself may be open with a roof supported on pillars, but most have walls of carved and painted slabs of wood. The altar is of carved wood or clay or some other material. The roof is often thickly

hung with the skulls of sacrificed animals and all sorts of other votive offerings. Both the altar and these objects bear traces of the blood spattered on them at the last sacrifice. The ordinary juju house is not always decorated with sculptured images and idols. As often as not there will be only a lump of clay, a stone, a mass of gum and feathers, or something like that. The Ibo have sculptures both of their ancestors and divinities, but these are mostly to be seen in the dwelling huts or close beside them.

To the Ibo reincarnation is natural. A person can be reborn as another human being. If a child shows a resemblance to a dead person, or if a child dies and another is born which is very like it, then it is certain that the dead one's soul has been born again. Other souls enter into trees or stones, others again into animals, for example, into pythons or crocodiles. Death or severe illness threatens anyone who kills such a reptile. He must report himself to the priests and pay a fine to the ancestors.

It is not only the pythons themselves which are sacred. A certain liana which resembles a python is taboo and may not be cut. The Africans say that the reason why many people wish that their souls should be able to live in trees or in objects of clay, stone or wood, is because they have had hard and wearisome lives. They fear being reborn into a fresh life of suffering and distress, and by acts of self-denial and sacrifices and the mediation of their forefathers seek to be allowed to settle down in the objects of their choice. That is why the Ibo appear to worship stones, lumps of clay and things like that. Their veneration is not directed at the thing itself but to the spirit living in it and so we sometimes have difficulty in comprehending what the Ibo sees in his 'divinities', shapeless

An Ibo market place.

ractising the sacrificial dance.

Juju house with white strips of cloth to protect it against demons.

Ibo women with heavy ivory anklets.

as they mostly are. Because stones are rarities in the delta, if one of any size is found it will be taken back to the village, especially if it has phallic shape, and it will often be turned into an object for worship.

The natives make no distinction between a god or spirit represented by a stone or a lump of clay and one symbolized by a sculptured figure. The latter are presumably a later development. Some Nigerian peoples are said to set the skulls of the dead on stakes and worship them. Poles graced at the top with a sculpture of the ancestor possess the same happy influence and have the advantage that they are easy to take about everywhere.

The Ibo hold some kinds of tree sacred because they were brought to earth by the earth goddess Ala. Some of these act as dwellings for the souls of the dead while awaiting reincarnation. If such a tree should fall, the place is marked in a special way, for no cultivation is permitted there since there may still be some ancestral spirits in the remaining roots. You can see at once if a tree is sacred, for, if it is, always there are pots with offerings standing at its foot. When fresh ground is broken, everybody assembles at the tree; votive offerings are produced, and the people dance and sing and call upon their ancestors to help them obtain a good harvest. It is only the good ancestors who live in these trees, which even a tornado cannot harm. The evil ones will try in vain to enter such an ancestral shrine. Those who have been murdered with weapons or by magic have to confine themselves to the tree-tops where they clamour and sigh at night in the breeze.

Spirits, as we have seen, also take up their dwellings in stones which thereupon become objects of a cult, whether they are set up in the juju house or lie outside either by the river's bank or in the water itself. Both

animals and human beings are sacrificed to these stones.

Some birds, too, are in certain areas held sacred and protected. One of these is the osprey which at times is almost tame.

The native idols, the sculptured images of their ancestors, are placed in their huts or on the graves or are taken with them on journeys. They are objects of constant worship. At meal times a little food and drink is always offered to the ancestral images or symbols, and in doing so they are asked to grant long life and many children. The fact of a sculpture being painted white means that it has passed from earth over into the world of the spirits.

As even the Ibo consider nature to be populated with spirits against which they have to protect themselves, they make use of charms, small sculptures or bundles of magical medicine of all sorts of stuffs and feathers, bones, wax, and so on. These they either carry on them or place where they are needed. These too are called juju by the white man, whom the natives of course are not inclined to enlighten as to their significance. They never know what the peculiar foreigner will not consider wrong and so forbid it.

One old man who was asked the significance of an amulet he wore round his neck replied:

'Why ask? Assuredly the white man who knows all things also knows an unimportant thing like that without asking me to tell him.'

These jujus are to protect the house against being bewitched, or the village from internal and external danger, to prevent and cure illness and help the crops, make hunting and fishing successful.

In this part of the world there are two hours when ghosts walk: midnight and midday. When the sun

stands highest in the heavens the air is full of spirits and children are then allowed to throw nothing into the air in their play. Spirits are driven out by the most appalling din which is begun towards morning with thumping of drums, firing of guns and banging of anything and everything that will emit noise.

The secret societies do not play the same part in the Niger delta and its surroundings as they do in Sierra Leone. There are many societies, but they are concerned either with administration or entertainment. Of course, they have a certain connection with magic and religion – they would appear to have been started in order to combat sorcery – but their purpose is not to sacrifice human beings and practise cannibalism. There is a leopard society, but it is comparatively innocent and confines its activities to stealing yams, to do which the members dress up in leopard skins.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF fertility plays a dominant part with the Ibo and the phallic cult is usual. Both the male and the female symbols are honoured with sacrifices. They are called ibudu and consist of naturalistic sculptures or symbolic figures. At times it is only the lower part of the body which is depicted, at others merely the trunk. A symbol can consist of a flat slab stuck with numbers of darts and that is supposed to promote the birth of many children.

The marriage contract is celebrated with sacrifices and special ceremonies, at which the bridegroom places certain foodstuffs before the protective deity of the house. What he must present is exactly laid down: eggs, yams, palm wine, gin from the white man, a special kind of fish, a sort of mashed turnip, and chalk. We need not concern ourselves here with the marriage rites; they are of course obligatory and followed by feasting as with us.

Men and women are forbidden to have intercourse out in the open. The work of clearing, sowing, weeding and harvesting takes a long time, and people sometimes spend months at a stretch in their fields. During this time they must live a life of abstinence or return to the village if they intend to have matrimonial intercourse.

If a couple intend to stay for some considerable time in one place and therefore wish to be permitted intercourse, they must seek permission of the nearest mighty juju, which will tell them what rites are required in order for a place to be released from the ban.

Despite the existence of strict sexual restrictions there are certain occasions on which both the earth goddess and the god of thunder allow free intercourse, which is supposed to have a favourable effect on the harvest and people's fertility. Here, too, there is religious prostitution – itself a fertility rite intended to influence the crops and growth of population.

Ife-Ala was one such juju connected with prostitution. The name signifies that the juju was in rapport with the earth goddess Ala. To this particular juju came those whom the ordinary black healers could not cure, and the juju priest accepted them as patients only on condition that they came with a virgin who was to be a present for him. These virgins the priest then hired out to men who had come to invoke the juju and who wished to have their virility increased.

These slaves of the juju had a shaven circle on their heads which was their cult mark. At one time there were about three hundred girls belonging to that juju. They were not allowed to have children – an Ibo woman is barred from sexual intercourse during the entire period of suckling which is accounted two years – so either the foetus was got rid of or the new-born infant was exposed in the 'evil forest', usually stuffed into a jar. Being deprived of their children was the worst thing in the lives of the juju prostitutes, and their joy is said to have been great when the British put an end to the juju and they were released and allowed to keep the children to which they gave birth. Another juju attended by prostitution was discovered when one of the women managed to escape and betray it to the District Officer. Her history was briefly as follows:

She had been abducted. Tied hand and foot she was taken to a place she had never seen. There stood an altar with earthenware pots and a basket with wooden

objects shaped like a phallus and painted red. She was led up to a man sitting on a stool whose face was hidden by a hood with eye-holes. He was attended by a couple of old men and a crowd of youths. The masked figure told the girl that she now belonged to the juju and must be subservient to it and obey all its commands. She would never be able to leave the place and must never marry. After a number of rites she was made to lean backwards and was held fast while the masked figure deflowered her with the red wooden objects and other instruments whereupon she was considered dedicated and was made to act as a prostitute for the juju. She never received any payment from her clients: the priest kept that. When she gave birth to a child, the old women attached to the juju forced her to put it in a large earthenware jar and place this upside down in the 'evil forest'.

She was rescued and the juju destroyed.

The authorities who put an end to the juju had no idea that they had to do with an institution with religious sanction. It is true, however, that the clever priests liked to take advantage of all the possibilities of profit offered by the old religious customs. The system of juju slaves and commercialized love could not, of course, be tolerated by the Europeans.

The Mbari house, a special sort of cult-building concerned with fertility erected on the command of the earth goddess Ala, is still to be found in the Owerri district in the west of the Ibo country. Ala is such an eminent divinity that only the principal chief of a village may be her high priest. The order to build a Mbari house is received from the goddess through her messenger and executioner Abara. He is said to be dreadful in appearance, having four horns on his head and a bird sitting on each. In one hand he holds a

sword and in the other a tuft of grass. Luckily he is invisible, but you know when he has arrived because the ground quakes. The priest now selects those who are to build the house, four young men and three young women from each part of the village. There are more men than women, because the fourth man in each line is needed to fetch and carry provisions from the village, to see to the 'chop palaver' as the Negroes call it. None of the others may leave the place while the work is in progress and it may take months. It is performed during the dry season and must be finished by the time work in the fields begins again. There is a dense fence enclosing the house so that no one can see what goes on there. The men and women all sleep there with nothing but a furrow drawn in the ground to separate them; intimacy is however out of the question: it would be sacrilege.

Once the house has been erected they model numbers of clay statues, many life-size, representing scenes from life. Above these tower images of the earth goddess Ala with her daughter on her knee and her husband, Amade-Onha, god of the heavens and thunder, wearing a pointed beard and holding a spear in his hand. He is hung with bells and rattles to symbolize the commotion he makes.

Domestic animals, wild animals and people are represented in various situations. They like depicting scenes which run counter to the Ibo's sexual taboos and are thus forbidden. It is said that the figures represent, among others, persons against whom enmity is harboured and whom it is wished to harm.

You can follow people and animals from the moment of begetting through birth and suckling to death. The medicine man is there performing operations, people fish, hunt, go in canoes, women pound oil palm nuts,

help each other to do their hair, sow and harvest. In among the figures twine snakes. A hippopotamus has half swallowed a boy, an elephant brandishes its trunk but falls to the flintlocks of the hunters, monkeys clamber everywhere, birds rest in their nests and a woman sits mourning by an open grave in which a dead man is outstretched. All life is mirrored there in its most intimate details. Always there is the figure of a large monkey: this is one of the animals into which the souls of bad men can go while they hang about waiting to be reborn in a babe, which is why they attack women in the forest. At times even that scene of rape is depicted. These sculptures are to a certain extent the counterpart of the gold figure weights of the Ashanti and the carved seats of the chiefs of the Chokwe of Angola on which all life's details are also depicted.

The Mbari house always contains some figures with a half-moon for a face. After all, fertility and the new moon have much to do with each other. The goddess Ala may not be modelled in other material than stone or clay.

When all is ready the parents of the young builders come bringing gifts of hens and new earthenware vessels filled with pure water. Only the parents are allowed inside, whereupon the hens are sacrificed, their blood poured into bowls and sprinkled over those present. The young men and girls may now return home, but not on foot; they are carried by the others so that they shall not touch the ground, because Ala might easily be angry if they did.

After that there is much feasting in the village. The fence round the Mbari house is torn down and burned. Now the harvest will be rich and the girls who worked on the Mbari house will all bear lovely children.

In the Mbari house is a smaller room beyond that

containing the sculptures and in it stands a phallus-shaped stone in which the spirit resides. This is the holy of holies. If someone is accused of evil doings he is shut into this inner room for a night. 'If he guilty juju kill him and corpse be carried out at dawn. Perhaps juju whip him dead perhaps kill him other way but always juju kill him. No help for such man.' If he is innocent then the juju leaves him alone.

The sculptures in the Mbari house may not be mended nor the building repaired. A fire must be kept burning there throughout the rainy season to prevent the clay figures from disintegrating.

Ala and Amade-Onha together answer for the harvest. Ala would get a Mbari house every five or six years and is thus the divinity who gets the most. Amade-Onha comes next.

The earth goddess Ala stands in close relationship to the ancestors. She it was who created the ground so that the dead could be buried, and she too introduced the first tree to earth. Several kinds of tree are therefore sacred, and it is in them that the ancestral spirits reside. A woman who wishes to become a mother prays to Ala and dreams one night that a certain tree lays a child in her arms. In the morning she lays an offering of a phallus-shaped lump of clay by the tree. That makes the dream real.

Both the god of thunder and the earth goddess are very strict about seeing that everybody lives according to the precepts. Those who practice witchcraft are afraid to go out in a thunderstorm when the god of the heavens is out and about. Everyone knows that a person who is killed by lightning must have been evil and such may not be buried like others. In certain villages all seed-yams are kept in the buildings where ancestors are worshipped so that the spirits may pro-

tect the store. At every meal a little food and drink is set apart for the ancestors, who may thus still take part in the family's daily meals and feasts. Once a week – with the Ibo the week is of four days – the ancestors receive a larger offering. Not only offerings and dancing are thought to promote the crops, especially the yam roots, but wrestling matches are also considered effective. These latter take place during the period before harvest begins and are held at various centres.

In reality the gods are the spirits of ancestors far remote in time who have acquired a greater measure of sanctity than later generations. In accordance with divine ordinance ancestors must be honoured by their offspring and relations, if prosperity and fertility are to prevail. The god – the father – is the ruler and begetter; the goddess – the mother – the one who gives birth and feeds, and then there is their son, fruit of their union. These are to be found under different names and with somewhat different functions in all tribes and groups in and around the delta of the River Niger. Then there is a number of minor family and local gods, father, mother and son can be represented by very dissimilar symbols. The father can be a clay figure under a tree, as he is among the Onitsha, while the great mother of all resides in some pointed rocks sticking up out of the water. The god can dwell in a couple of earthenware pots, in a stone or in a piece of metal. That is why, as we have already said, you must not expect sculptures in the ordinary juju house.

As a clan in a village gradually grows, the new families acquire in addition to the family of gods, father, mother and son, their own subsidiary family deities concerned with their own origins. These are quite simply ancestors, persons of importance to whom

worship is now addressed. Large numbers of ancestors are deified in this way.

Ikenga is a very popular figure, almost a kind of mascot. He is represented seated with horns (symbols of strength) on his head and holding in his hands either a pitcher (symbol of abundance) or an axe and a severed head (symbol of victory). He might be called the patron of success. Ikenga helps a man to get on in life; make him plenty of sacrifices and look after him and your Ikenga will bring you a good income from which you can acquire titles and power. Ikenga is a figure carved out of wood and painted.

Another fetish said to be a protection against mishaps is symbolized by an earthenware pot filled with medicine, while a yam-root and earth from the fields give good luck with the harvest.

There is a god in a stone in the stream near the village which worships him. Slaves, mothers of twins and other persons without social privileges are strictly forbidden to see it. Every year the god's priest must prove his fidelity by swallowing a mass of mashed yam with a number of sharp fish-bones in it. If he can digest that and come to no harm, it is obvious that the god is helping him.

The smiths, like the priests, have their own town, Awka, from which they go out in all directions to do their work. They must, however, all return by a certain day every year when they must sacrifice to the god Ukwu. The word 'Ukwu' means foot, here used in the sense of foundation, support. Absence is punished with a large fine, and after two years' unlawful absence a smith loses his right of citizenship.

Only the men of Nri and the first-born sons, okpara, may be priests. It is the priest who distributes kola-nuts to guests and pours out palm wine for them. He per-

forms the sacrifices, cutting the animal's or person's throat and sprinkling the blood over those taking part. At family gatherings the first-born takes precedence over persons of high rank. The men of Nri are holy because all families are thought to come originally from that one place.

The first-born inherits all the father's best qualities; he is also on an especially intimate footing with the ancestral spirits and knows how they are to be worshipped and the rites performed. He is father for all the house-slaves. People of nervous or hysterical disposition do not become priests, but are employed by the priests as mediums and oracles. Some priests in charge of important jujus famed for their ability to promote the growth of yams may not remain in office more than a certain number of years. The high guardian of the Elele juju may not rule there more than seven years; but they are profitable years, for he is overwhelmed with gifts. When the seven years are up 'he dies of himself' as it is called, and his chief wife undergoes the same fate. In reality a strong and enterprising man can make himself the priest's successor just by attacking and killing him. Thus the priest never goes outside the walls of his compound, but every soul within them also acts as a sort of guard. It lies in all their interests that no stranger should suddenly seize power.

The high priest is not infrequently a regent. He only officiates in the juju house on especially solemn occasions, though the second priest is continually on duty for making sacrifices and has a third priest as his assistant. The fourth priest attends to the drum, the fifth blows the horn made from an elephant's tusk. The sixth struts round the village on solemn occasions proclaiming the god's greatness and beating with a

rod on a tortoise-shell. Sometimes the priests in a god's service have titles which to us sound horrible: 'Killer of adulteresses', 'He who skins and shaves head trophies', 'The Butcher', 'The Blood Licker', etc. It is obvious that here cannibalism is a part of religion, even an indispensable sacrament. The high priest is the only one who does not have to partake of the human flesh.

It may be of interest to learn something about the well-regulated existence of rulers and kings. The wealth of strange prescriptions governing their conduct has acquired the sanction of religion, and they cannot be altered.

In Nigeria there are several kingdoms whose rulers are officially called 'Your Highness' by the British. Such a one is the famous Benin, once a mighty realm with a court of barbaric splendour where sculpture in bronze and ivory carving stood higher than anywhere else in Negro Africa. The bronze heads and reliefs which once graced the columns and walls in the king's palace are now to be found in museums. The realm has lost its power and its glory, but the king, the Oba, still resides in the capital in a far from palatial, dismal range of houses with no artistic trimmings. The capital was entirely destroyed in 1897 when the British burned it and now it is nothing compared with what it used to be.

The king, however, still has a royal household with various functionaries and dignitaries. On ceremonial occasions he puts on regalia made of coral which is so heavy that he can only wear it for a short while. He is supported under the arms by two dignitaries of the realm, yet that is not because of the regalia, but because such has been the custom since the time when the ruler was a cripple. The people may not see this

fine red regalia, for a screen is always borne before the king hiding his face and body. The king is held to be immortal. The fact that a king answered the call of death was kept secret by the priests. For this reason the people were never allowed to see his face. It is the immortality of the soul applied to the king. Several other rulers in Nigeria whom I visited were similarly not allowed to show their faces to the people.

In olden days the Oba was regarded as a divinity but was to a very great degree dependent on the priests. Benin was a rich and mighty land. The Oba was far from content with the few wives to which the present black ruler now limits himself, for he had three thousand, including the half-grown girls to whom the king was betrothed and whom it was thought safest to keep in the harem. No man was allowed to approach the harem and it was forbidden under pain of death even to touch the wall round the harem building. It is easy to imagine what happened to those implicated in marital infidelity. Nowadays, Negro chiefs must content themselves in such cases with exacting compensation from the seducer for 'unauthorized use of another's property'. The Oba zealously sacrifices animals – in olden days people as well – to his predecessors. A message for the dead one used to be whispered into the ear of a slave who was then immediately executed. When a ruler died, hordes of people had to accompany him into the grave. Benin has also been described as a cruel despotism and its capital called 'the city of blood'. In both statements there is a certain amount of exaggeration. The king was entirely in the hands of the priests and human sacrifice was ordained by ancient custom. Human beings were sacrificed, it is true, but they were neither innocent slaves nor free citizens, but criminals. The

slaves were certainly treated better there than by the white man. Mendicancy and poverty were unknown in the Benin of olden days, and none needed to starve. Things are hardly as good as that anywhere in Negro Africa to-day. In those days the forest that surrounded the city was filled with the corpses and skeletons of those who had been executed as sacrifices, and those who had died of certain diseases who might not be buried but had to be thrown out into the so-called evil forest, their skulls being set up on stakes. It must have been a gruesome sight.

White visitors received the impression that in Benin blood flowed in torrents; yet there is nothing to indicate that the kings of Benin were especially cruel by African standards. They alone had the right over life and death. And that was true not only for people: if a man fell from a tree and so was killed, the matter was taken to the king who condemned the tree to be felled. Even such a death sentence was reserved to him alone.

In Benin the office of king is hereditary and goes to the eldest son. It used to be said that the king's mother might not survive her son's accession to the throne. Another woman was appointed official queen-mother, but the king might never see her. The idea presumably was to prevent the queen-mother acquiring power over her son.

This was also the case with a neighbouring king, the Alafin of Oyo, whose mother was requested to 'go to sleep', i.e. kill herself, when her son was crowned. Often an African king's life is ruled by a number of precepts which must make it rather burdensome. It is usual for him not to be allowed to eat or drink in the sight of any other persons. If you are invited to partake of anything with him you are politely left alone with

your refreshment. The old king of Onitsha on the Niger might not leave his house without sacrificing an ox – previously it used to be a slave, which must have been cheaper, but the British forbade it. The king was miserly and never went out.

His neighbour, the holy Eze of Nri, lost both wife and children on being elected. They were sent away and he had to get himself new ones. He might never turn round, never go past water, not even a puddle, never go into another person's house through the door – slaves knocked a hole in the wall for him, when he paid anyone a visit. The two last-named rulers had to submit to a whipping after being elected so that they might be mortified and purified.

To revert for a moment to Sierra Leone, the chiefs there, too, have long had their lives regulated by peculiar precepts. I have already mentioned how the ruler of the Temne had to ascend the mountain of pre-ordained death after a certain number of years. Among the Temne a new king was never chosen from the same family as that of the old, otherwise that family could become too influential. The newly elected was allowed to spend some weeks in a secret place in the forest to think the matter over. He was sounded – as we say these days – by the council of elders before coronation.

In Sierra Leone women rulers have acquired great prestige and more power than perhaps anywhere else. They have had the support of the women's secret societies. I met one of those rulers, the Queen of Blama, called 'she with the silver crown', for on official occasions she wears a large silver-plated regal crown. She was a competent old lady for whom everybody had the greatest respect. I won her heart by making her a present of a steel mirror in a red leather

Ibo images. The most ancient is on the right.

In the Anguleri district the girls wear innumerable copper rings until marriage.

A small sacrificial temple in a yard containing a sacred tree.

case. A mirror which did not break – she had never owned such a thing before, and my present was requited with two beautiful and angrily snarling leopard cubs.

Some female rulers might not marry, but they had the right to select a man for themselves for a certain period. The one chosen could not refuse. An English District Officer in Nigeria by the name of Hives had an awkward time with one such black queen. That was many years ago now, and she ruled a jungle tribe which had had very little to do with the white man. Acting on orders from above Hives went to the queen's village and was very well received, thanks to the presents he had brought with him for that distinguished lady, who proved to be quite young and not without charm. It was when she went to Hives' bungalow to pay the return visit that the fatal thing happened. The residence pleased her, and the big English iron bedstead interesting her, she at once lay down on it to try it out. Delighted, she called to Hives: 'I like this bed, so now you are to be my man and I shall stay here for a bit.' The poor District Officer did not know what to do. The queen paid no attention to his stuttered excuse that he had a wife and child at home in England, so he simply fled like Joseph once did from Potiphar's wife. That had unpleasant consequences, too: it earned him the queen's displeasure and a snub from above, where it was considered that he might have been more diplomatic in his conduct. I don't know what I should have done in his place. My 'queen with the silver crown' was fortunately much more reserved, but then she was also both accustomed to the world and well on in years.

The former kingdom of Lunda (in present-day

Angola and Congo) was already powerful and rich in the sixteenth century. The country was also called Mwata Yamvos – that was the ruler's title. He was overthrown half a century ago by his vassals, the Chokwe Negroes, and among them you will still find kinglings of Mwata Yamvos' line with the title Sir Lion and Sir Leopard. In the old days the country grew rich through selling slaves and ivory to the Portuguese, and now that part of the country has acquired perhaps even greater economic significance through its diamond fields. It is, however, no longer the ruling family which benefits from them.

The members of this family, petty kings and chiefs, are of different blood from their Negro subjects. Their straight noses and thin lips show that they obviously belong to an old race of conquerors. The realm of Lunda was well organized. The vassal states were on the whole allowed to manage their own affairs provided they paid their tribute, while their own subjects were not taxed – that is to say, they had to give presents to the king and these were obviously obligatory. The ruler had to share the power with one of his sisters, who had to remain unmarried. She was allowed to select lovers for herself, but these had to disguise themselves as women to give a gloss of innocence to the affair. The king's mother also had quite a considerable say in various matters, and he was always succeeded by his sister's son – that is one whose mother had been sister to a regent and so had experience. The king had no real dwelling of his own. His wives all had a hut apiece and he lodged with the eldest and most eminent. Over his subjects the king enjoyed full rights of disposal. If he saw a girl who pleased him, he only needed to inscribe a mark on her chest with his finger and she was his property. He did

the same with any stalwart youth he might wish to have for his bodyguard.

Strangely enough it was the most eminent member of the bodyguard who washed up the king's platters, which were made of wood. A high official was in charge of them. The court was large and there was a large number of dignitaries. One important post was that of the man whom the king used to ride. You cannot keep horses in that climate because of the tsetse fly which transmits sleeping-sickness, and, instead, the king was carried on the shoulders of a courtier – one might call him an equerry. Among those who had the title Mwata, lord, were two whose duties were magical. The one, a doctor of magic, was a household physician whose only function was to conduct the king's funeral. The other was there to keep the vigil, which lasted until the body had decomposed to such an extent that the head fell off. Thus the king always had his undertakers waiting round him – perhaps as a reminder of his mortality.

SACRIFICIAL CANNIBAL FEASTS AND OTHER GRUESOME THINGS

SACRIFICE IS ONE of the basic rites in all West African ancestor and nature cults: human sacrifice, animal sacrifice and offering of foodstuffs such as roots and eggs or palm wine or other gifts. Besides these are offered up all sorts of objects and raw materials such as iron and cloth. European trade goods are used to a certain extent nowadays, and I have often seen enamel plates in the temples. Sometimes they have been incorporated as a decoration in the mud altar or shrine.

Owing to the energy with which the authorities have combated human sacrifice, animal offerings have become more important. It is always domestic animals which are sacrificed, and these would appear to be kept exclusively for that purpose. The spirits eat the actual essence of the sacrificial flesh as of other edible offerings. Animal sacrifice is inferior to human sacrifice which is, of course, saved for occasions of special importance and for the more eminent divinities. Besides the daily small offerings to ancestors and the larger weekly sacrifices of the blood of fowls or goats, rites involving sacrifice are performed on all sorts of ritual occasions: birth, marriage, menstruation and arrival or departure of members of the family.

There are, however, larger feasts in which the whole community takes part, and at these the sacrifice is killed by the priest and not by the head of the family. These are, for example, those connected with sowing and harvesting, the hunting season, and so on.

It is mostly fowls and goats which are sacrificed, less

frequently creatures which are both costly and rare in that climate. Dogs, too, are sometimes sacrificed, but usually to the spirits of illness and not to divinities of higher rank. Dogs are difficult to obtain in the Ibo country and white people who keep them have to watch them well – they are often stolen to be eaten.

The shedding of blood is at the same time a tribute of appeasement to the divinities and a purifying and preventive measure against the influence of evil and hostile spirit-powers. The blood is smeared on the altar and all sacred things in the juju house, as well as on the forehead of each person present.

Sacrificial animals ought preferably to be white, white being the colour of the spirits. White goats or fowls must be sacrificed when an answer from an oracle or a prophetic pronouncement from the priests is required. The white chickens, perhaps, were introduced by the Portuguese who, as is known, also brought white fowls to South America during the age of discovery.

It has been the custom to offer a fowl and an egg daily, or a couple of times a week, in order to prolong an old chief's life. The blood was mixed with earth and rubbed into the old man's forehead and chest. Palm oil also figures in sacrificial rites. The participants rub themselves with chalk, red clay or pigment on the face, limbs and trunk. Trade spirits or native beer are offered – the gods always require drink which is sprinkled on the sacred symbols and up towards the sky, or down on the earth in the case of the god of thunder and the earth goddess.

The most important and most sacred is the human sacrifice. It has always existed and was considered necessary for the maintenance of religion. It originated with the gods and has been handed down to the present

generation through a long succession of forefathers.

Our own forefathers also sacrificed animals and human beings in considerable numbers. For example, during the midwinter sacrifice at Uppsala in Sweden blood flowed in streams and the bodies were hung up in the trees, just as was done in Nigeria after a victory.

The blood represents life itself and is mystically linked with the soul. The shedding of blood is essentially a holy act, and our attitude, based on moral and humanitarian grounds, to a rite which the Africans consider necessary, is to them incomprehensible. They do, though, have a certain understanding of the economic point of view. Human sacrifice is expensive. At the beginning of this century, which was the heyday of this bloody rite, a slave cost about £10. When a man died perhaps only a single slave might be sacrificed if the family were poor, but usually several were sacrificed and even as many as a hundred. Such sacrifices had considerable economic impact – not least perhaps in the labour lost to the economy by the death of slaves. When you remember that these Negroes are always anxious to conserve and increase their property in order to acquire power and dignities – which is not possible without opulence – you can understand that sons and heirs did not go to the expense of these sacrifices without compelling necessity. Usually they feared the displeasure of the gods and the departed more than the punishment of the government.

Before proceeding, I had better say something about burial customs. It is absolutely essential for a burial to be performed according to the time-honoured forms and that nothing should be omitted. The ceremony constitutes the uniting link between the world of the

living and that of the dead. The soul of the deceased has to go on a journey: first to the realm of the dead and then to the world of the spirits, and he cannot do so successfully without a correct burial. Two ceremonies distinct in time are prescribed. The person must first be buried corporeally and then spiritually. Unless this is done, the soul is not allowed to associate with properly buried spirits, is unable to eat and drink with them and can get no farther along the way to the realm of the spirits. These so to speak 'lost' spirits constitute a disruptive element in communications between the living and the dead, where otherwise complete harmony should reign.

Soul and spirit are actually one and the same to the Ibo, but it is called soul as long as it remains in the body and spirit after it has been released from the body. Thus the soul does not die with the body: it lives on.

The realm of the spirits to which the dead go if they have been buried in strict accordance with the prescribed ritual looks just the same as the earth and has the same villages and fields, except that there is perpetual night. If someone dies in a foreign land he can still find his way home again in the world of the spirits. The dead meet the living in dreams or in visions. The Ibo believe in the significance of dreams as do many of us.

Animals and plants also have souls though these are different from ours. He who has not been properly buried becomes a roving spirit and is on a par with the demons in all but name. To be an outcast soul is the most awful fate a Negro can imagine, worse than being bewitched, because it means eternal expulsion and strife. These lost souls at times assume animal form. They can assault and rape women in the forest,

and when they do that, the errant spirit can take up its abode in the child that results.

A dead husband may also return and try to have nocturnal intercourse with his widow. This is considered to be very risky for the widow. 'My dead husband has returned several times and tried to have intercourse with me,' said one woman who was accused of being a witch. 'I was forced to prepare medicine to put an end to it, as otherwise I might have died.'

A man who during his lifetime attended to his affairs with zeal and authority will still have much say in the conduct of the household after his death, and therefore his survivors maintain contact with him.

In the realm of the spirits the dead can see each other, but they are invisible to mortals, other than those versed in magic who can see everything.

It sounds strange to our ears when the Negroes speak of the month in which they are forbidden to die. That however is the case with the seventh month, the month of the earth goddess, during which she does not permit anyone to be buried. Complicated rites and great expense are entailed before a dispensation can be obtained.

People killed by lightning may not be buried, for this will anger Ala. If a tree has been struck by lightning, they do not dare use its wood, it must not be used for kindling, for both its warmth and any food cooked over it are dangerous.

The dead who are exposed in the 'evil forest' do, however, receive offerings in jars which are always broken, whereupon the spirits of the gifts emerge and follow the dead.

Frightened as the people are of offending the spirits of those of their ancestors who received proper burial,

they are even more afraid of the 'lost' spirits, which are considered both malicious and evil. These are capable of attacking unexpectedly, and so the different categories of spirit have to be kept in a good humour by means of sacrifices and offerings.

The funeral sacrifices are for both the dead person and for the ancestral spirits who divide the sacrifice among themselves and eat equally of it. They thus need not feel tempted to come over to our world to kill and eat there. Even the poorest family scrapes together as much as it possibly can in order to hold a burial feast which will benefit the dead person and their ancestors and ensure good communications with the world of the spirits. What does it matter if the survivors are financially ruined, as long as the burial is as it should be?

If two chiefs are especially good friends and one of them dies, the survivor will often contribute considerable sums to the cost of the funeral. The deceased chief's family is then, however, obliged to reciprocate with similar gifts on the death of the donor. A commoner is wrapped in a white shroud and his death announced at once, but a chief's body is preserved with smoke, for his death has to be kept secret until the family has got together sufficient means to hold the funeral. To this all close relatives contribute.

For the villagers a chief's funeral is a diversion. Apart from sacrifices, open house is kept for all visitors who come with condolences and gifts. Goat's meat and chicken, yams, palm oil and much else is served liberally and with especial consideration for the women whose task it is to take part in the lamentation. They sit huddled indoors and weep loudly. The dead man's eldest son and daughter walk round and round the house crying over and over again: 'Welcome my

father! My father is a great man! Son of a great man!' While the chorus of weepers joins in: 'So it is! So it is!'

The corpse is wrapped in a mat and buried while the feast is continued in the house of mourning with dancing and singing – the dance of course being an important magical rite with primitive peoples.

As we have already said, this first burial, the so-called feast of departure, does not suffice. Later follows the feast of lamentation, more costly than the preceding. Without this feast the spirit risks having to stay among the 'lost' and to feed itself on grass like the animals. Only kings and little children are exempt and can enter the realm of the spirits without the feast of lamentation.

At this second funeral feast human sacrifice was obligatory in the case of important persons. Originally twelve slaves was considered the minimum number for a chief. They would be purchased in advance for just this purpose and were sometimes buried alive. The guests were feasted and a lively fusillade frightened unwelcome demons away.

The feast ends with a memorial meal in the house in which the chief lies buried. This always takes place on a market day, when the village is full of people feasting and dancing.

It is only chiefs who are buried in huts; for commoners there is a special burial place in the forest. A dead person who has been buried elsewhere can be re-buried in 'consecrated' ground. To do this they go by night to the place where the person lies buried, and there a priest summons the spirit of the dead person to the sound of muffled calls on a horn. The spirit is next induced to creep into a little box, specially brought, which is then closed up. Thereupon the soul is transferred to the common place of burial.

On the death of a chief the 'wake' with its singing and dancing can last for weeks on end, even for months.

The dead person takes with him all objects and tools of which he may have need in the life hereafter, and domestic animals and male or female slaves were once buried with him. Three or four slaves accompanied a chief into death in order to hold his hands and feet and help him up when he had to embark on his journey. Slaves were also hanged in the huts or rooms where the dead man used to sleep, eat, receive people and bath. The idea was that they should serve him in the world of spirits just as they did before, and perform the same duties as they had in this world. They were afterwards cut down and their heads chopped off. Should a little boy in playing pick up a head it was considered a good omen for him.

There was a special name for the slaves bought and kept for the funeral feast, oka or awka, that is 'foot', meaning that they shall serve as messengers and attendants. The English 'footman' is a comparable term. The female slaves whom a rich woman bought for the same purpose were called abor, which means basket. They were to carry her shopping baskets in the world of the spirits. In the old days virgins were also sacrificed at a chief's funeral. A king was accompanied into the grave by slaves of his household and various dignitaries along with their insignia.

In some parts prisoners of war were, by ancient custom, killed and eaten. They were executed in a special place situated some distance outside the village. The killing of the prisoners was a great honour which was accorded to the very distinguished or the particularly brave. Sacrifices had to have their heads cut

off. If the person or persons appointed to be the executioners did not wish to deal the blow themselves, they could let somebody else do it in their stead, it being necessary for them only to take and hand over the sword.

The executioner, however, had to lick the blood from the sword, as did every man who killed an enemy in battle; for otherwise the sight and smell of blood could make him strike in savage frenzy even at his own countrymen. The only sure antidote to such madness was the taste of blood.

Every person who kills another should drink of his blood and eat of his flesh. The blood gives life and strength and the same is true of the victim's body. His vital force is imparted to the victor.

The bodies of the executed were hung up in trees while the heads were brought to the village. On their return to the village the executioners were met by their female dependents. Then followed a grim and barbaric scene. The executioners' sisters took the gory heads and danced with them through the village with savage gesticulations and weird caperings. They rolled the heads along the ground and jumped over them shouting out that these were their brothers' trophies. Once home they would scald, skin and cook the heads. The bodies were taken down later, cooked and eaten.

Those who performed the execution had to remain at home for three days; they might not go out, must sleep on the bare ground and eat and drink from broken vessels. On the fourth day they went round and visited their friends in all their finery.

The sword with which the executions were performed was held in high honour and might not be used for anything else. In it lived and dwelled ancestral spirits. Everything which belongs to a person and is

used by him, retains something of his soul. Thus things which are inherited have souls and must be respected. Thanks to the spirit dwelling within them they perform their service in an experienced and excellent manner. An axe is eager to get to the forest and chops down the trees without apprehension – the spirit of the family dwells in it. These ideas serve to link the past generations even more closely with the present.

It was not only for the purpose of accompanying dead chiefs into the other world that human beings were sacrificed. There were other circumstances, too, when recourse was had to human sacrifice. It was used to ward off threatening dangers – after a campaign revenge is always a possibility. Leonard relates how in Benin great numbers of slaves were sacrificed to ward off the vengeance of the white man after the massacre of the whites which later led to the overthrow of the kingdom by the English in 1897.

Even ancestors required human sacrifices in certain events, and these too were used to propitiate malevolent powers.

A crime as serious as that of disturbing the peace of the market was punished with death. To the market places came people from various quarters and different tribal groups, and a serious conflict there might have the most far-reaching consequences. The victim was tied up in the middle of the market place and left to die of hunger and thirst. If a person could afford it he might substitute a slave. Thus it was the sacrifice which was the main thing to appease the spirit of the market whose peace had been violated. Later an ox was killed instead.

In the old days, in the fishing villages at the mouths of the delta rivers, a man was sacrificed annually. He was tied to a stake out in the water and left there till

the river, the crocodiles or the sharks took him. The purpose was to propitiate the spirit of the fishing grounds and so to promote the fishing.

When peace was concluded between two quarrelling groups a slave had to be sacrificed on the frontier. The blood thus shed was blood of reconciliation.

Then there were scapegoat sacrifices. A person was selected who was to take all evil, all spiritual impurity with him or her to the other world. He, or she, died so that the others might live more securely. In the Niger delta and its interior even up to our day it was quite common for young slave girls to be sacrificed for the sake of the people. They were acquired for that purpose, were treated very well until their time came. The priests would fetch the girl and lead her round the village. In each house she was allowed to choose whatever she liked of the things she saw there. She might take everything with her. When she was quite satisfied, when there was nothing more that she wanted, she was taken down to the river and drowned as a sacrifice to the spirit of the river.

Mostly, however, it was more cruel than that. Two slave girls were bought by the villagers jointly – the one to be sacrificed in secret for the king, the other for the will of the people. This latter was well looked after and given plenty of good food. One day, however, she would be seized by the priests, tied hand and foot and dragged by the feet face downwards through the entire village while her tormentors kept calling out: 'Evil! Evil!' The occupants of every hut they passed would come out and throw sticks or pebbles at the victim at the same time shouting and adjuring all evil there might be in the hut to go with the poor sacrifice who was eventually drowned in the river.

One rule which was strictly observed was that only a

person quite free of all blemish might be sacrificed. He or she might not be maimed, nor even squint or lack a finger or a toe, and there must not be the least wound on the body. The same applies to sacrificial animals.

The exposure of twins can be regarded as a sort of human sacrifice. The Ibo and their neighbours consider the birth of twins most unlucky. To have one child is natural, but to have two is not. Evil spirits must have had a hand in it. Some peoples exposed one of the twins, that born second, in the forest; others did away with them both. The mother of the twins was considered unclean and driven away for a considerable period or kept in a sort of quarantine. The hut or huts which she had used in her compound were unclean and all foodstuffs, wood and such things in them must be thrown away. The chickens and goats were sacrificed. The birth of twins formerly cost the unfortunate father a lot in the shape of the iron bars and cowries he spent in buying sacrificial animals. The worst term of abuse one can throw at a woman is 'mother of twins'.

In certain places the mothers of twins are compelled to live permanently isolated in so-called twin-places, to which their husbands are denied access, though they must maintain their wives. They may receive visits from strangers, however, and thus it can happen that an interned wife surprises her husband with a new offspring. This is handed over to him and is regarded as his, but the natural father has to pay for it.

It should be noted, though, that there are other peoples in Southern Nigeria among whom the birth of twins is greeted with joy and considered an especially happy event.

These peoples' yearning for offspring is incredibly strong, and they shrink from nothing which is thought

to promote fertility. There have been cases of pregnant slaves being sacrificed. They are opened up, the foetus removed, divided up and eaten by the barren women. During warlike operations foeti have been removed from women who have been killed and taken away by the enemy.

Human sacrifice promotes fertility. Streams of blood have flowed and still flow when the yams put out their first shoots and need to be strengthened, and also at the time of the harvest. Nowadays human blood has mostly been replaced by that of goats and chickens, but they are zealous in their sacrifices. When the harvest is over Ala, the goddess of earth, must be thanked for her favours. In the old days it was risky for people to venture into strange territory at those times – they might be seized and sacrificed to Ala.

People were also sacrificed to the big signal drums of hollowed tree-trunks which are to be found in some of the bigger villages, and which served, among other things, to call the men together on the outbreak of war. The most famous drums could not be seen by any except he who came with a chopped-off head. Enemy captives were sometimes sacrificed by being made to kneel by the drum with their heads over its rim, whereupon they were decapitated so that their heads rolled down over the drum. That is how two Nigerian native policemen were once sacrificed. In the old days it was not unusual for some types of West African drum to be decorated with dried human heads and to be covered with human skin. The Cuban Negroes still use a coconut, *coco africano*, as a substitute for the head in their drums. The drums were carved with reliefs concerned with fertility: the snake, symbol of the phallus, and the tortoise, symbol of the female organ. Dance festivals with these drums are held at the time

Small Chokwe cult-site for hunting-magic.

Masks used at the circumcision ceremonies of the Chokwe.

Pipe-smoker. Angola.

of germination and harvest. The drum is sounded inside the house in which it is kept, but the dance takes place outside and in this the head-hunters come forward and proclaim their feats.

On one occasion a British District Officer, who had gone out with some soldiers under the command of an officer in an attempt to parley with the natives, found the villages abandoned. Then he remembered that one of his interpreters was expert at signalling on the drum, and he asked the man if he could speak with the people through the drum and explain to them that the white man did not intend to do them any harm. The man promised to try.

The white men made their way to a nearby village in whose market-place a big signal drum stood in state. It was used for imparting information and to call the people together. It was in effect a sort of broadcasting station. The drum was made from a huge hollowed tree trunk and decorated with carved figures: a man, a woman, a dog and a crocodile – all Ibo symbols. Such a drum is beaten with sticks of varying thickness and emits a higher or lower note depending on the stick used and the force of the blow.

The interpreter was now ordered to send the following 'telegram'.

'Come to the market-place without fear. The white man is here and wishes to talk with you. This is no war-palaver. Come!'

It did not take long to translate into local drum-language and the interpreter began to signal. At intervals he repeated the signals. Undoubtedly they must have been heard several miles away and by night they would have penetrated even farther.

One of the white men had never heard of this signalling system and did not believe in it.

After the interpreter had been at it for half-an-hour and was already pretty tired, it looked as though the experiment had failed. But then a few natives appeared and gradually they began coming from all directions. The message had been understood.

HOW SOME CULT PLACES WERE DESTROYED

IT IS INTERESTING to see what impression the juju places at which cannibalistic rites were practised made on the British who had to destroy them in the course of their duties. Obviously, they saw everything from its worst side, but their accounts give an idea of how those cruel rites must appear to white people. The Negroes' view is quite different, and the ideas they have inherited from their forefathers are still by no means eradicated.

We have previously mentioned the so-called Long Juju. This was destroyed, but it had successors. Oracles with greater or lesser reputations grew up.

The British administrators – the District Officers – had every reason to be on the look-out for sacrificial rites since human sacrifice was common. There is an excellent description of such a feast given by Frank Hives who succeeded in tracking down the juju in question and paying it an unwelcome visit while a sacrifice was being made. He also destroyed what was probably the last crocodile juju.

By comparison with other watercourses of West Africa the Imo is no great river, but it is of importance because it is navigable for large trading canoes and flows through country which abounds in oil palms. It has been one of the main channels for the export of palm-oil.

The coastal people had long had a trading monopoly on the river. They would come up from some coastal

village with two or three large canoes laden with trade goods, empty sacks and empty barrels. Sometimes they would go inland, but mostly they stuck to the river banks where the natives built huts for them. There they stayed until they had filled their barrels with palm-oil and the sacks with palm kernels. They then took these to the coast and the canoes returned with fresh goods. Profits were good, for they could fix prices themselves since there were no competitors, yet they made even more out of trafficking in people. They bought, or kidnapped, youths and girls. There were strong suspicions that these were not infrequently sacrificed to act as servants to dead chiefs in another world. This went on for many years after all such traffic was officially considered to have ceased. The District Officers found it very difficult to do anything about it, and no one dared betray the least information about such things.

Now about the river's jujus. It was believed that the whole river was a juju and that its priests could transform themselves into various animals; crocodiles, lizards or giant snakes. Such animals must therefore not be killed on pain of death.

The souls of dead chiefs were thought to enter into crocodiles which were thus held in honour and from time to time fed with human flesh, through which they became doubly sacred.

The people who lived on the river's banks and were largely dependent on fishing had to swear an oath of fealty to the juju of the river. The oath was taken in a very peculiar manner. Certain flat stones weighing about twenty-five pounds were kept immersed at certain points in the river. The priest laid one of the stones on the swearer's head where the man had to balance it without touching it with his hands. A leaf

from the juju tree was then fashioned as a funnel and stuck in the man's mouth. Then river water was poured over the stone and some of it of course ran through the funnel into the man's mouth. He had to swallow the water, and thereupon he must swear always to uphold the prestige of the juju, not to betray any of its secrets, to guard the river and give immediate warning of any impending danger. If anyone broke his oath, he was punished with death which was dealt in an especially inhuman fashion.

If the stone fell from a candidate's head during the ceremony it was a sign that the juju rejected him. In this event he was sold as a slave, for he was considered so despicable that he could not be allowed to remain in the district. The natives, however, are so accustomed to balance loads on their heads that, if the stone ever fell, it could hardly have been fortuitous; the priests must have had some hand in it.

One thing not mentioned in Hives' account is that the Aro (or Aro-chuku, god's children) call themselves 'the stone-sitters', ono-na-kum, from the fact of their sitting on stones in front of the juju house while the rites are being performed. Certain men are trained as soothsayers and after a period of isolation in the jungle they must carry four stones (on the head, shoulders and chest) to the village of the god Atakpo, where the stones are laid on the ground and a hut is then built over them. There the soothsayer practises his art.

As we have already seen, stones are often the symbols of gods. Everywhere in the delta you will see small juju-houses consisting of a roof without walls curtained with a white cloth. Inside stands a white stone or lump of clay representing one or other of the water spirits and some bowls, plates and platters intended for sacrificial gifts.

In the Niger delta there is a certain quiet creek where some aged crocodiles live watched over by a priest. As soon as the crocodiles hear his voice they come up out of the water and the priest feeds them with fowls or goats. It is said that there are priests who only need to strike a stick on the ground to attract the monsters out.

Crocodiles, as has already been said, are in many places the object of worship. If people fall victim to them, it only serves them right, for they have angered their ancestors.

Frank Hives relates how there was one juju called Nkuku, which he was particularly anxious to deal with. It was difficult to locate, but gradually he succeeded in scraping together odd bits of information. It was obviously powerful and feared, as could be heard from the voices of the people when they spoke of it. He had also received a number of complaints of children having disappeared, and always in pairs and before a full moon. The friendly-minded chiefs insisted that it was not a question of ordinary slave traffic, but they would say no more. But what was worse still was that a uniformed native policeman also disappeared in the same mysterious manner. That made Hives even more eager to get at the juju. He even considered it possible that he might himself go the same way, which, as he put it, would have shown his superiors how grave the situation was, though he would have preferred another way of opening their eyes.

With much difficulty Hives got a small patrol put at his disposal. There were two white officers and a doctor. However, there was no intention of using force unless they were actually attacked.

They marched by narrow winding forest paths and passed through several villages. Hives knew that it was hopeless to try and question the natives about the

juju, for no one would dare answer his questions in public and he would just be interrogating so many liars. Instead, he instructed his interpreter to make discreet enquiries. He was to say that all information would be treated in confidence and he was authorized to offer a 'dash', or present corresponding to the value of a wife, which in those days amounted to about five pounds worth of trade goods.

That was a good bait and already that evening the interpreter had found a man willing to supply information. He did not, however, dare show them the juju place himself, but only the path which led to it. He also demanded a promise of absolute secrecy, which he was given.

The way it was arranged was that the man was engaged as an ordinary temporary porter and walked ahead of Hives. As they passed the path leading to the juju, the man dropped his stick as though by accident. They did not set off down that path at once, but went on to the next village and then returned to their base where the porter was dismissed. The following morning they set out again in full force to search for the juju. The path leading to it was so narrow that they had to go in single file. The Negroes at the head must have had an instinct of what it was all about for they were obviously on their guard.

After about half a mile of difficult going Hives saw the men at the head of the force suddenly crouch down; they put up their rifles and dashed forward. The others ran after them and emerged into a little clearing. All round this was a number of small open sheds roofed with palm-leaves built over mud-altars. There was, too, a number of extraordinary things: strips of cloth that had once been coloured hung from the roofs, eggs were spiked on sticks, live chickens squawked

pitifully as they dangled by one leg, and round a tree trunk were tied some skulls of cattle.

On the altars stood earthen pots full of something that stank; there were pieces of clay rolled like sausages, and quantities of feathers. Every altar was surmounted with a human skull without its lower jaw and had obviously been recently sprinkled with the blood of either animal or man.

In the centre of the clearing grew thirteen young juju-trees, planted in a circle and strung with rags, skulls of dogs and goats and decaying bits of food. Beneath each tree lay a large flat stone from the river. The largest stone under the tree with the most decoration was no doubt intended as the seat of the head priest, the others for his assistants. (Stones, of course, play a large part in the doings of the Aro priests.)

They were unable to find any such path as ought to have led on from the clearing, but one of the soldiers discovered a small shallow stream flowing close by and quite hidden by the greenery. Hives realized that this was the way they should follow, which they did. A couple of hundred yards farther on they found a path leading up from the stream. It had obviously been used quite recently, and led up a steep slope until suddenly they found themselves standing in front of a semi-circular wall of stone blocks piled one on top of the other and out of this flowed the waters of the stream. The two ends of the wall abutted on a sheer sandstone cliff in the background.

There was an appalling stench there. The three Europeans, though not Hives, held their noses; but in the end Hives, hardened as he was, felt almost ill from it, though he pretended to be unaffected.

At first they thought they had come across a sort of fort, yet it appeared to be deserted. It was an old wall,

for the stones were mossy and ferns grew in the crannies. Some of the soldiers climbed the wall and looked over, but they just jumped hurriedly down again – shouting excitedly. All they would say when questioned was: 'No good. Bad thing live.' So the white men had to look for themselves, and Hives climbed up followed by one of the officers. Holding their noses they looked over the wall.

They saw a semi-circular stretch of water reaching almost to the wall. At the foot of the cliff was a stony beach and it looked as though there were a cave there. What had scared the soldiers lay in the middle of the pool, quite motionless, staring at Hives and the officer with eyes glassy with expectation. It was an enormous crocodile, and was half in and half out of the water. When it caught sight of them, it began slowly to approach and though it could scarcely have reached them, they instinctively shrank back and leaped to the ground with more haste than dignity.

There was no knowing how many monsters there might be lurking in the pool. The soldiers were all for sending a volley into the water, but Hives wished to do the shooting himself. He borrowed a loaded rifle and climbed up again. The creature was only a few feet away. It opened its jaws as though expecting a titbit. Hives aimed straight for its mouth, fired and leaped down again. There was a dreadful sound of splashing. When it stopped, they all climbed up once more. The monster was dead. The shot had entered its mouth and penetrated the brain.

There was no sign of any more crocodiles, but to be on the safe side they decided to have the wall down. Eventually they managed to dislodge several stones so that the water gushed out. They jumped aside and held their noses again – for the stench was appalling.

The bottom of the pool was now visible. It consisted of stinking mud, in which they could see human bones. Now they knew where the vanished children and the policeman had gone!

They then demolished the entire wall and dragged out the dead crocodile. It was fourteen feet long and undoubtedly very old. Presumably it had spent its entire life in the pool and probably had been so well supplied with human flesh that it had never tried to get away.

The cave also had to be investigated. First they fired a volley into it, and immediately there was a muffled roar followed by a weird soughing sound. The native soldiers were scared:

'He juju, he talk!' they muttered.

If they had not seen the Europeans standing there unperturbed they might perhaps have taken to their heels.

Another volley was fired with the same result.

'Let we go,' muttered some of the native soldiers. 'Juju far too evil.'

Nor could Hives explain that strange noise. However, he had the men collect some dry grass, which was made into bundles, lit and thrown into the cave. Thick smoke billowed up, and that had an effect. The mystery of the cave was solved, as out flew numbers of large bats. Dazzled by the light and half-suffocated by the smoke they fluttered wildly hither and thither, into the men's faces, into the mud, everywhere.

The soldiers were only too ready to laugh at their fears. Hives entered the cave which was empty except for some half-decayed human remains. A spring welled up from the rock at the back of the cave.

After that they returned to the juju grove to which they dragged the dead crocodile. There they pulled

down the sheds, made a bonfire of the whole lot and laid the crocodile in the flames. Some of the men protested, for they thought it a pity to destroy so much meat and they wanted to eat the crocodile. Remembering the brute's diet, however, Hives found the idea revolting: such a meal would have smacked far too much of cannibalism.

They departed very well pleased at having destroyed Nkuku.

Afterwards Hives learned that the sacred crocodile had been fed regularly with human flesh. In fact, it got no other food, unless it managed to snap up a bat. The villages took it in turns to send it a couple of victims.

There had originally been two crocodiles in the pool. One of them was said to have assumed different shape, its soul transferring itself to a certain chief. The truth probably was that it had got out and made its way to the river.

Before they left the village, the one who had shown them the path was given his promised 'dash', but there was no getting out of the man more about this juju. He swore that he had never seen the place, only heard of it. Hives could never get any proof against the juju's priests.

Afterwards Hives regretted not having had the crocodile flayed and taken the skin as a trophy; but they had been so eager to destroy the juju that no one had thought of it at the time. However, as he says, 'I metaphorically cut another notch in the handle of my tomahawk to mark one more defunct juju'.

That was the crocodile juju. There remained the successor to the Long Juju.

It was assumed that the juju had been utterly destroyed and that it had lost its prestige, for it had

not been able to protect itself. But such was not the case. Most of the Aro priests had fled, including the head priest, and they set up again in other places which they kept secret as long as they could. As soon as they suspected that their secret was becoming known to too many, they moved again. Thus it was exceptionally difficult to obtain definite information as to where the oracle was, though it was known to be somewhere within the district.

Hives had also heard of an oracle called Kamalu after the priest who managed it, but for a long time he could not locate it. He realized that it was conducted on the same lines as the Long Juju, that is to say, the fee for answering questions was paid in slaves. Some of these were sacrificed to the juju and the rest sold to the families of dead chiefs, for them to be killed in order to act as the dead man's servants in the life hereafter. A number of such 'servants' were sacrificed every year, the number increasing with the eminence of the dead. The victims' heads were thrown into the chief's grave, while the members of the family feasted on the bodies.

The activities of Kamalu soon became quite extensive. People kept disappearing in a mysterious manner and the authorities began to receive complaints. For a long time, however, it was quite impossible for Hives, who was then assistant District Commissioner, to find out where the oracle was. Chance came to his assistance: he happened to overhear one of his own policemen, Okoro, being summoned to the juju's sacrificial feast. It was very difficult to get anything out of the man; he was promised freedom from punishment and reminded of the white man's power and very strong juju, and in the end he did talk.

He began telling Hives about their nocturnal

meetings, and, prepared for horrors as Hives was, what he heard made the hair stand up on his head, and after that he was all the more eager to destroy the ghastly juju. He suspected that Kamalu's headquarters were not far off, and so was not surprised when the policeman told him that they were nearby at a little village some three hours' march from the camp.

That very night the blood brotherhood was to hold a large feast to which all members had been summoned. The informant could not say whether he had been ordered there as a guest or victim. He feared the latter, as he had begun to grow rich, having three wives, two cows, several goats, chickens and dogs, as well as three children. All that would become the property of the juju were he to be sacrificed.

By the time Hives had extracted this information it was seven o'clock, and he reckoned that he should be able to reach the juju before midnight if he started at eight o'clock. He gave orders for the policeman to be guarded so that he should not escape, had a meal and got ready for the night march. He was only able to take four of the native police with him and these he reinforced with four Hausa porters who, being Mohammedans, had no respect for the jujus of the Ibo. They had their own special djinns or demons. He also took the court clerk, Banigo, and, of course, Okoro who was to show them the way.

Late in the evening they reached the village near to which the juju was supposed to be, not having seen a soul the whole way. They then halted and Hives now explained what he intended doing, not having done so before as he knew that now they would be more afraid to go back without the protection of his juju than to go forward. They did show signs of

fear, but there was no panic, as he had feared there might be. They obviously had confidence in his being able to protect them against supernatural powers. They were not afraid of men. The porters appeared delighted at the thought of possible booty and jeered at the policeman's fears. Hives was sure they would not let him down, especially as he told them that the juju they were attacking was nothing in comparison with his or their own.

Hives wished to time his arrival for the culminating point of the grim ritual. When they reached the place, they were to make as much noise as possible, fire shots and rush straight for Kamalu. The juju members must be led to believe that they were being attacked by a whole troop and take to their heels, but Kamalu was not going to escape if Hives could prevent it. If any of them tried to put up a defence, Hives intended shooting them down with his revolver at close quarters.

They set out again and had not gone far when they heard the sound of drums. At first Hives thought they had been discovered, but Okoro told him that the drumming was part of the ritual and intended to drown the death shrieks of the victims. They increased their pace and soon had passed the small village of Anang. It was dead and deserted. It seemed as though fear had paralysed the entire countryside. A bit closer to the juju place Hives ordered another halt during which they loaded their arms.

They were now all very excited. Several of the men obviously had their hearts in their mouths, especially Okora as was only natural. Hives was not afraid, but very conscious of his responsibility, for he knew well enough if he were successful everything would be fine and he would be commended, but if things went

wrong, or if anyone were killed, he would be held responsible. However, nothing venture, nothing win, so he went on.

The path grew narrower and narrower, until the branches of the trees at times met across it. Often the twigs were just above their heads. Through the foliage trickled moonlight to speckle the path with light and make glittering pools. Hives was afraid that they might have posted guards at the entrance to the juju place, and that a warning shot would give the priests time to escape, which would knock his plan on the head. There was also the risk that they might all be captured and sacrificed in honour of Kamalu. Okoro, however, assured him that they never put out guards. Kamalu was so convinced of the power of his juju and its ability to keep intruders at a distance that he did not consider it necessary to have guards. Hives, however, did not feel at all safe and expected any moment to see the flash of a gun being fired at close quarters.

The beating of the drums sounded nearer. Soon they could also hear the monotonous chant of ritual songs being sung by a soloist and choir. At intervals above the chanting there rang out the piercing shriek of a victim. It was obviously no pleasant death Kamalu dealt. Hives felt sick at heart, and almost surprised that his men did not take to their heels and run. Those ghastly shrieks coming out of the jungle at night chilled even his blood.

They increased their pace again and emerged into a glade. There in front of them they saw an earthen wall, and in it an open door through which firelight poured out. Nothing happened. The drumming continued as before.

Hives rushed towards the door and into a low room. Just as he dashed in, a fresh agonizing shriek rang out.

The room, however, was empty. The ceremony was being held some yards away beyond another doorway, curtained with a mat. By the flickering light of the fire, which burned on the other side of the curtain, Hives saw two cheap and colourful German oleographs, one on either side of the door. Such pictures were sold by the traders in those parts and greatly favoured by the natives. The one represented Christ walking on the sea, the other Lazarus being raised from the dead. Both pictures were framed in double rows of human skulls with the lower jaws removed, without any doubt the most unsuitable frame imaginable. The room was empty except for some stools, earthen jars and drums.

Both Hives and his men were trembling with excitement. Hives raised the mat-curtain and saw a sort of tunnel some thirty feet long. At the far end of it more firelight shone. From the roof hung a row of bells of every conceivable size and shape, obviously meant to signal the approach of those with no right to be there. Hives whispered to his men to crouch down so as to avoid the bells and to keep close behind him. However, the noise the feasting made was such that they could have set every bell jangling and no one would have noticed it. The few seconds it took them to traverse the tunnel seemed endless. At the mouth Hives paused for an instant. He caught a glimpse of a number of brown figures moving round and round to the sound of drums and saw bodies glistening with sweat in the firelight.

At that moment an unpleasant feeling of being alone came over him, but when he looked round there were his men behind him. Then he took a step forward and surveyed the scene. What he saw was an open space flanked on two sides by walls, closed on one short side

Screened hut for women in childbirth and girls at menstrual periods in a Chokwe village.

Chokwe boys practising a dance in the circumcision camp.

Medicine woman in southern Angola.

by the hut through which they had come and on the other by an enormous cotton-tree with huge flat, longitudinal, buttress-like flanges. In one of the flanges a hole had been made large enough to drag a person through, and it proved later that it was through this opening that the victims were hauled inside.

The big fire burned in the middle of the space. To the right, close to the wall, stood an open shed, and in it sat an appalling, dreadful figure. The head was hidden by a bast-covering with little bells fixed to the bottom of it, and the rest of the long garment was painted black and yellow like a tiger skin. On his head the man had a crown of fish-eagle's tail feathers arranged like a fan.

It was the eyes and mouth which gave the figure its dreadful appearance. They could be seen through the openings in the mask. The eyes shone redly in the fire-light like those of an animal. The mouth was contorted in a grin that bared the man's yellow fangs, four of them filed to points. In one hand the figure held a long sharp wood-knife, its handle decorated with blood-spattered feathers, in the other a sort of sceptre made of iron with a number of projections each terminating in a bell. It was covered with a substance like pitch in which cowries, human teeth, and skulls of young goats were stuck and surmounted by a human cranium in which the teeth rattled when the sceptre was shaken. That was to give the impression of the dead speaking. (Hives was able to give a complete description of the equipment as he afterwards took everything away with him as trophies and so was able to study them.)

The juju itself was a spherical object made of all sorts of things stuck together with a sort of wax. There were bits of human skulls, teeth, fingers and toe-nails,

blood-soaked rags, feathers and egg shells. The juju was set up in front of the sitting figure who, of course, was Kamalu, the head priest himself. Besides the four musicians there were four assistant priests standing close to Kamalu and dressed in the same style, though not quite so elaborately. They held long cruel-looking knives and heavy whips. It was obviously they who tortured the victims.

There were about twenty dancers, all stark naked. They were prancing round a little tree to which a man was tied – obviously the next victim. They shone with sweat which ran down them in streams and helped to increase the stench prevailing there. Their legs were spattered with the blood from four headless bodies which lay on the ground beside the juju priest. These bodies were covered with marks. In fact it looked as though the unfortunates had been whipped to death. Obviously they were intended to regale the guests at the conclusion of the seance.

Beside the fire stood two pots in each of which two human heads were cooking. It was obvious that they had only recently been severed from the bodies. According to what Okoro, the juju brother, told Hives afterwards, the 'broth' was to be drunk by all those present. The skulls and lower jawbones were intended for Kamalu's collection to increase it and enhance the power of the juju.

Having seen all this which takes much longer to relate than to glimpse, Hives, who was standing a couple of feet inside the passage and invisible, then burst forward into the open space shouting a war cry and firing three shots from his revolver. These were answered by a volley from his men, who followed him howling like hyenas. It was surprising that no one was hit in the back, for when a native uses a gun there's no

knowing what will happen. Perhaps some of the juju men were wounded – but that is not known.

As Hives and his men stormed in, the dance came to an abrupt stop and Hives heard them shout 'Abaja-aka onu bira!' 'the hairy man has come'. Thereupon they all rushed, not at Hives as he had feared they might, but at the walls and sought to clamber over them. In other circumstances it would have been amusing to watch them convulsively trying to fight their way to the lowest part of the wall, trampling on each other's faces and shouting, but there were other things to think about.

Suddenly the place was empty but for Kamalu and the victim tied to the tree. The juju priest might also have succeeded in getting away if he had not been hindered by his long garment, and he was besides old and no longer so active. Hives made straight for him, slipped on the blood-sodden ground but just caught Kamalu's legs as he fell. He hung on to them and shouted for help.

Kamalu had a grip of the top of the wall and there he hung shouting for his men, cursing them for abandoning him and threatening vengeance – at least that is what it sounded like. Then the four Hausa porters went to Hives' assistance, jerked the priest from the wall, laid him on the ground and held him tight.

Hives told his police to go on shouting and fire a few shots into the forest to keep the routed well frightened, and ordered Banigo to release the victim from his tree. While this was being done he and the four Hausas had a real tussle with the old savage they had captured. He fought like a madman, kicked, scratched and tried to bite. Hives tore off one of the Hausa's loin-cloths and wound it round the priest's

head – suspecting that his teeth might be poisonous from the corpses he was accustomed to eat.

Having got the prisoner securely tied Hives began to look about him. He would need evidence at the impending trial, so he ordered his men to gather up everything, and they got away again as quickly as they could, there being no occasion to stay there and wait till Kamalu's people rallied. They gathered up the juju paraphernalia, the sceptre, the bloody knives, the juju itself and the pots with the boiling heads – first pouring off the broth. All this the porters carried, while the police saw to Kamalu. It was not easy for them to get him through the narrow passage, but they did. Hives stayed behind a moment to put a match to the big palm leaf roof, and they had not got many paces away before the whole establishment was ablaze. Hives felt that perhaps he ought not to have burned it because with it he destroyed a certain amount of evidence, but doing so enhanced his prestige in the district where the natives considered his juju to be stronger than Kamalu's, for that had proved itself incapable of defending either the temple or itself.

They marched unmolested until they reached the government rest house in Erriam, where Hives called a halt and removed the loin-cloth from Kamalu's head, not wishing to suffocate him unnecessarily. If looks could kill, that would have been the end of Hives. Kamalu glared at him, his cruel eyes bloodshot, ground his teeth and then began to scream in a frenzy, so that Hives had to silence him by stuffing his handkerchief into the old priest's mouth.

Having seen to the loads and said a few words of recognition to his men Hives looked round for the intended victim, the slave Banigo had freed, but he had gone. No one had seen him go, and Hives never found

him though he had a search made because he needed him as a witness. Probably he was too frightened to be able to distinguish between friend and foe, and he was presumably captured by the fugitive juju men who would have seen that he received the fate intended for him.

That, then, was how some of the old juju places where human sacrifices were performed were destroyed and rendered harmless. Many still remain.

WITCH DOCTORS, SPIRITS AND MEDICINE

OVER ALL THE parts of Africa in which I have travelled the influence of the witch doctor is great. He is the authorized physician, soothsayer, clairvoyant and exposer of witches. Not infrequently he also has a hand in the weather. He heals the sick, drives out evil spirits, finds out which spirit and demon sent this or that misfortune or illness, and exposes those who occupy themselves with bewitchings.

The witch doctor can be helpful. He banishes spirits. He can also send evil to people. But he has the right to do that. Ordinary witches who practise black magic are considered criminals and must die a cruel death, just as in Europe in the olden days.

First a little about the medicine men of the Niger delta.

According to the ideas of the Africans, all illness is caused by evil spirit-powers. Especially where there is high fever, in epileptic attacks or in mental aberrations it is obvious to lay the blame on the spirits. You can imagine these forcing their way into the sick. From there they can also affect a person's external appearance as in the case of smallpox.

Everything is associated with the ancestors. If any of them died of a certain illness and a descendant is attacked by the same complaint, the people believe that the illness has been sent by the dead person. Perhaps he wants to have the company of his descendant in the world of the spirits. If that is so, he must be persuaded to desist from this purpose.

Ancestral spirits speak with each other in the world of spirits and to their descendants in dreams. An adult person is sometimes possessed by a spirit and then often has the gift of tongues. It is the spirit in the possessed person who speaks, not the person himself.

Women are especially liable to have water-spirits enter into them, and these cause them to act temporarily in a peculiar manner, as though they were under the influence of others. On such occasions some acquire the gift of prophecy. This may also happen to men, priests or soothsayers who then speak with the tongue of the divinity by which they are possessed. In one district there was a high priest who, when he felt that the god's spirit had entered into him, used to spend one week fasting immersed in the river. After that he was taken to the juju house where after some days' isolation he began to speak to the people who assembled with drink offerings mostly in the form of the white man's gin. He prophesied misfortunes and explained what sacrifices were necessary in order to avert them and ensure the favour of the gods.

If a person became possessed by an animal spirit, he or she imitated that animal's sounds and movements. Since ancestral spirits at times enter animals, there is some connection with the dead here as well. It must not be forgotten that Africans hear talk of transmigration of souls from their childhood on. If someone begins acting like a wild animal, growling and biting and hurling himself at others, strong men are summoned to hold him or her – and mostly it is a woman. Then the person possessed is given raw meat to eat or a bone to gnaw, and that is said to have a calming effect. Often the attack passes of itself. As far as possible no other measures are taken, but in serious cases experts are called in. The exorcism is performed by a medicine

man in the presence of the chiefs and the relatives. The medicine man wears a necklace of claws and teeth, has a number of small bags and calabashes containing medicine hanging from his belt, and the skin round his eyes is painted white. Before the assembled chiefs and relatives he tries to drive out the spirit with spells, songs and dances. Always there must be available some object into which the spirit can be driven, some household utensil or an especially made cage.

If a person considers that he is under the influence of an evil spirit or that he has been condemned by demons because of some error he has committed, he is quite likely to waste away and die. Such peculiar cases have been reported from various parts of the world and not least from the Niger delta. In a number of tribes suicide is known, evidently for similar reasons.

Medicine men are numerous and competition keen. The people are afraid of them because they know about poisons and can harm as well as heal. They have been able to make for themselves a position of considerable importance. The people of the delta consider medicine to have such magical properties that it is sometimes regarded as a sort of divinity on its own or as the symbol of one.

Some kinds of medicine are intended to prevent, alleviate or cure diseases. The ordinary preventative medicine is a concoction brewed from all sorts of vegetable and animal ingredients. It is kept in a large earthen vessel placed at the entrance to the house. This vessel is never cleaned and its contents diffuse a highly unpleasant smell. It is, however, considered miraculous and those dwelling in the house never fail to sprinkle some of it on themselves when they are setting out on some important or risky undertaking. Sometimes they make the image of a man out of a paste of various

vegetables which the person can carry about with him as an amulet or else eat partially or altogether. It is then, as the natives say: 'buried in our bodies'.

Other medicines are rubbed on the body to protect it against bewitchment, evil spirits, accidental death, rain and much besides.

On the outbreak of an epidemic all the women jointly prepare a medicine which is put out on all roads leading to the village to avert the onslaught of the spirits of the disease. Then a witch doctor of repute is summoned and he distributes plaited rings as a protection against the disease. He then requires offerings for the house gods: white cloth, chalk, chickens, goats and other things are offered up to them. If those wearing the rings become infected despite them, it must be because the demons of the disease are more powerful than the medicines. In that event the village is left in the power of the demons of the disease – it is quite simply abandoned and they all move to another place. Neither ancestral spirits nor medicine prevail over the demons if things are really bad. The demons may have an older claim to the place where the village lies.

The medicines intended for the cure of illness contain the gall of snakes or leopards, and other ingredients from the animal and vegetable kingdoms. The patient must follow all sorts of complicated instructions and impose many restrictions upon himself. If the medicine fails to help, that will be because he has not followed his instructions in detail.

All sorts of medicine and amulets are used by warriors for their protection. There is medicine which a hunter can use to bewilder a wild animal's senses when he attacks it, or to transform himself into a tree so as to avoid being attacked himself. If one medicine does not help at once, a fresh doctor with different

medicine is often summoned, with the result that a patient is frequently treated by three or four doctors one after another, and is taking or being rubbed with their various concoctions. A doctor can see a patient's fate in a bowl of water – he sees the soul fluttering there. If it disappears the patient must die.

The spirits in the medicine are held sacred in the same way as the household gods. The spirits of the poisons, however, are evil, and people have to protect themselves against them, but of course do not sacrifice to them.

These feared and indispensable witch doctors and soothsayers represent the connecting links between people and spirits, and they alone know how the secret medicine works. By its means they can compel the spirits even when the help of the ancestors has proved insufficient.

In South Africa, where there are no priests as such and the secret societies do not play the same part as on the Guinea Coast, the witch doctor's power is especially great: The witch doctor knows how to prepare medicines that bring misfortune. If someone wishes to harm or kill an enemy or bring calamity upon a village, he can order medicine and magic from a doctor. For a very stiff fee the latter will give him the medicine in the form of a prepared stone or necklace or a bundle of bones or feathers. The object, whatever it is, has to be smuggled into the victim's hut or laid at his door. It then works by itself. According to native ideas the witch doctor is in no way responsible for having thus helped to charm people to death. He has merely fulfilled an order. If the client won't pay what the doctor wants the medicine is adjusted accordingly. At a murder trial in Swaziland some years ago it came out that the accused, a Swazi, had asked a

witch doctor for medicine to kill a white man whom the accused hated. The doctor had declared himself willing to supply this for a fee of £50 – a very considerable sum for a Negro. The vindictive Swazi could not scrape up more than £12, but nevertheless the doctor gave him some medicine for the money: a stone smeared with 'medicine so strong that it shone at night'. This was introduced into the white man's office but had no effect on him. The Swazi then took matters into his own hands and shot the white man. The witch doctor was also indicted and brought to trial. The magistrate sarcastically pointed out that the doctor's medicine had had no effect whatever. The black doctor answered swiftly: 'He could not demand better for the little he paid.' The witch doctor could not be prosecuted for his part, even though the white man had died after the medicine had been placed in his room, because the law did not recognize the dangerous properties of the medicine.

The witch doctor, says the native in Southern Rhodesia, is a man who sees through and through, that is to say, who sees through everything. He sees into people's hearts and souls and into the core of things. However, in one respect he is blind, at least according to the ideas of that country: he cannot see what goes on in his own house. He cannot heal his own wives and children, but has to call in a colleague if they fall ill. The witch doctor in South Africa need not only gather herbs to brew medicine for his patients. He is not an apothecary, nor is he a priest. He has no altar and knows no prayers. He can work exclusively with magic. His equipment consists of small magical wooden discs which he spits on and then throws up into the air and which talk to him, a sealed magic horn containing medicine and much else. Thus armed he can reach the

most vulnerable part of a person's soul. He can kill another with ease merely by speaking his name. His power is equally great whether he is acting for good or for evil. He is truly omnipotent, for he can avert misfortune that threatens, strike down your enemies, bring calamity upon your neighbour and make his harvest fail while you yourself have good crops, many wives and children. He can both curse and release from curses.

The person who goes to him for help does, of course, make a payment of cattle or something else, but in some cases the witch doctor takes no fee himself: it is the spirit concerned who receives the animal offered! Each spirit has its price and can be bribed. The witch doctor can make the ancestral spirits come and talk with him. He can put them in a benevolent frame of mind or he can provoke them and the demons, just as he wishes. He can point out witches, whose fate is thereby sealed.

The witch doctor has great influence on all deliberations. He is the only one who can get in touch with people's forefathers, against whose will nothing is ever done. It is always possible that many years previously the forefathers had decided something which has since been forgotten. The spirits however have good memories. The doctor whispers their message in the chief's ear and that decides the matter.

These people spend their lives in an atmosphere of magical cross currents emanating from certain objects or medicine sent by demons and witches. As there is a means of killing at a distance, so there is a means of warding off death sent in that way. People protect themselves fairly well with amulets or other magical objects.

Nature is infested with demons of the earth and

forest, some of them not unlike the djinns of the Mohammedans and our gnomes and goblins. There is a sort of dwarf who strikes up a conversation with children. The dwarf asks: 'Where did you see me first?' But the children must beware of getting into conversation with it. They have been taught that they must point at the horizon and say: 'Over there I saw you!' Then the little demon disappears in the direction in which the children pointed. Similar beings watch, for example, the chief's hut by night and are kind though touchy.

The witch doctor also gives warnings of demons who inhabit springs, holes in the ground and mines. The safest thing is to crave pardon in a loud voice before drinking the water or stepping down. Otherwise you risk getting a hard blow or a violent push and being knocked over. In mine-cavities the spirits spurt water or tumble blocks of stone over the intruder. But otherwise, if treated properly, they are quite innocuous.

A number of years ago a certain mine in Rhodesia had to be closed down because the spirits in it were continually causing flooding and people could not be induced to work there any longer. Africans who knew about it maintained that if the white men had found out how to placate the spirits and put them in a benignant frame of mind the work could have continued undisturbed. A python oracle in the vicinity could have told them what should have been done. As things were, however, the mine, police station and store all had to be abandoned and the entire valley left in the possession of the jubilant spirits.

All these spirits of nature are only dangerous locally. Not so, however, the spirits of the dead. People have two kinds of soul, the one, shave, is a sort of shadow of the other and more impersonal in character. The

personal soul, mudzimu, continues after death as part of the family circle giving advice and assistance. Both kinds of soul are the objects of cult. The personal, proper ancestral spirits have with the passage of time acquired an element of divinity. They devote themselves to the family, to the village, or to an entire tribe. The impersonal soul, which during the person's lifetime was not to be distinguished from the other, is abandoned on his death by the true ancestral spirits. While the personal soul manages by itself and can help those that come after it, the shadow-spirit lives a sort of parasitic life, being incapable of getting along without going into an animal, some object or a person. It never stays with the dead person's people, but departs to a different part of the country, where it can sometimes serve as a sort of auxiliary spirit for hunters, smiths or others, and it may well stay in the one family for generations if it gets on with them and likes it there. Of course, it has to be regaled, and to have strength it must be given blood to drink. Both categories of spirit can appear through mediums. It is the ancestral spirits who send illness. In such cases the witch doctor is sent for.

To divine the cause of an illness the witch doctor makes use of small oblong discs of wood with stylized figures burned into them or carved in relief on them. They are constructed by some mysterious process and reveal the secrets of the world of the spirits. Each series of four discs represents a different principle: that of the mature men, the mature women, the youths, the girls. The witch doctor may use up to eight series of these discs which the Africans call 'bones', but usually he has four series, that is, sixteen discs. He spits on them on the top and undersides, throws them on the ground and studies them. The

first throw discloses the reason for the visitation: illness, death, a disaster in the village. Then begins the investigation of the conceivable causes: can some sort of spirit have caused the annoyance? Has an ancestral spirit been offended by the person by neglecting something due to him? When all other causes have been eliminated there remains but the one possibility: bewitchment.

Let us assume, however, that it is great-grandfather who has been offended. He must be placated. What does he want?

The discs give the answer: meat. Then a goat is produced, maize-flour and water are poured on its back, and the spirit is hailed and informed that the animal is his. The meat is then cooked and again they call to the spirit: 'My father X! You said you wanted meat. Now I have cooked the meat you mentioned.' The summons to the spirit is always preceded and concluded with a certain formula of greeting.

The spirit receives its share of the meat and meal, and the rest is eaten by those present. The person making the offering takes a helping himself and says: 'I have eaten.' The spirit must, of course, be shown that what they are offering him is good food, such as people appreciate.

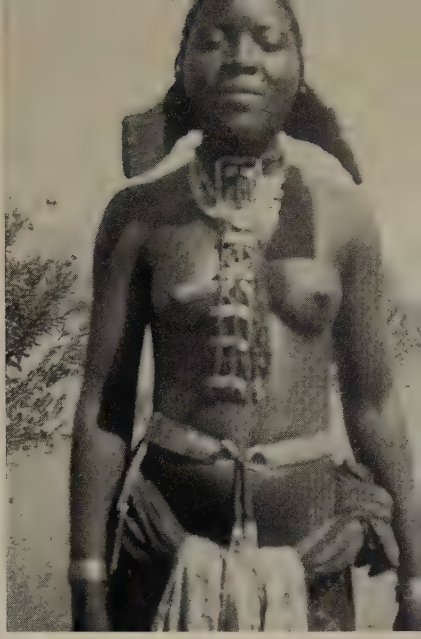
The ritual is different in the case of the shadow spirits. These do not eat, but they drink blood, beer or milk. If one of these spirits has caused an illness, a lot of beer has to be made and then the spirit must be hailed and told that the brew is made and later that it is ready. It has to be covered with cloth of a particular pattern and colour. When the brew has fermented there is a general beer-drinking and dance with the spirit-drum sounding – this lures out the being which caused the illness. While they are all dancing

and drinking one of the women usually becomes possessed: the spirit has gone into her. She begins to tremble and shriek. The beer offering and the sick person are now brought to her, and the spirit in her called upon. The dance and beer-drinking continue throughout the night.

If the spirit normally lives in a baboon, the person possessed behaves like one of those animals. In such an event they throw her groundnuts or other things which a baboon likes. If the spirit lives in an animal of prey, the possessed is given blood to drink. There are various ornaments and materials prescribed to be worn by the sick person in these cases, but the beer-drinking and the dance are always the same.

The witch doctor's garb of office consists of a belt with different animal tails, a mantle of leopard skin, a necklace of snake bones, a fillet ornamented with cowrie shells and an ostrich feather. There are certain spirits which he drives out with the help of a pan-pipe and rattles.

Certain birds are important magical animals. One 'power-belt' worn by witch doctors is made of the bones of birds, lions, and snakes. Ospreys are reputed to be magical in both West and South Africa. They sit in trees which overhang the water and their droppings sink to the bottom. The witch doctors dive for this, because osprey droppings are more precious to them than gold. The woodpecker is also magical, because it bores its way into the marrow of the tree, that is, to the core of things. When there is a new moon, medicine men, after fasting, drink a decoction of dried bird meat while observing a certain ritual. They strengthen themselves by taking medicines, but do not give these to their patients. There is, however, a number of herbal medicines which all and sundry



Girls and women from tribes in southern Angola.

South African dances.

can prepare and these are made in the home.

Though the witch doctor, largely, is not considered to have power over the weather, there exists in dry South Africa a special class of medicine men, the rain-makers, who only occupy themselves with that. They have to have a special aptitude for their art and this is inherited from mother to son. Besides this, they have to make use of effective medicine. The queen mother of Swaziland is particularly famous as a rain-maker; she takes care of the big medicine which is used for the purpose and which can almost be said to be the property of the state. The king has also to some extent inherited her skill. I shall not say more here about rain-making, which I have dealt with in my book *Afrikanskt*, but suffice it to say that private practitioners in South Africa do not usually need to starve.

The following strange occurrence took place some years ago in Southern Rhodesia.

A chief somewhere near the Portuguese frontier by ancient custom had the duty of watching over a young girl who must retain her virginity since she had to be at the disposal of the rain god in case he should wish her for his wife. Since time immemorial that had been the god's condition for his sending rain. The chief was naturally responsible for having the girl guarded, because a lapse on her part would mean drought and failure of the harvest.

Now, one year the rain did not come for so long that the harvest was endangered. The old chief got it into his head that one of his sons, a man already in middle-age, had seduced the girl. There was no proof of this, but some medicine man perhaps had whispered it in the old chief's ear. At all events he reported the matter to a neighbouring chief whose hereditary duty it was to punish the offender.

This had to be done in secret without the knowledge of the white authorities. The chief had his men surround the hut of the accused by night. The victim was then seized and burned alive. It was the third time such a thing had happened since the white man had taken power in the land. And rain fell within forty-eight hours! The authorities got to hear of what had happened and intervened. No sooner had the chief been sentenced, than a violent rainstorm came even though it was right in the middle of the dry season, which was a thing that never happened; and when the chief was later released after serving his sentence there followed a period of better rains than anyone could ever remember. Don't try to persuade those people that what the chief did was wrong! Had not the rain god supported him and approved the deed?

The dividing line between the sorcerer practising black magic and the legitimate witch doctor is sharp and distinct, but it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between the different categories of 'doctor'. In the north of Southern Rhodesia there apparently are herb experts who employ only drugs, others who use both drugs and magic, and then the witch doctor proper. There are herbal medicines to smear on wounds or to be taken for different complaints. The magical medicine is the most important. The witch doctor has a large horn filled with medicine which is to protect the entire village, and smaller horns with medicine for curing various ailments. One medicine produces smoke to make the sick person break into a sweat, another is a protection against lightning, yet another protects against lions. To sprinkle the medicine on the patient the doctor uses the tails of various animals.

Among the Kaonde in Northern Rhodesia, not far from Angola, there are no temples, no priests, no ritual. The witch doctor is the connecting link with the world of the spirits. The spirits are everywhere; they see and hear everything. Spirits are often malevolent and they have to be coaxed. At times it is necessary to fool the invisible ones; and therefore the Kaonde learns to lie. If anyone has had a quarrel or an unsettled dispute with a person who has died, that person will assuredly come sooner or later to make his displeasure felt.

A dead person's shadow is not buried with him, but remains in the village. The shadow and the spirit have the same name. A man can shut his shadow up in a little pot and by doing so hope to live longer. It is, however, a risky thing to do, for if the pot or horn is lost, then he is without his shadow and must die.

Ancestors are symbolized by poles set up close to the huts, and whenever anything of importance is being undertaken, offerings of a little flour are made them and the ancestors asked to lend the project their support.

Among the Chokwe in Angola the men in possession of magical power, wanga, are either soothsayers, witch-finders or actual medicine men – in other words: specialists. Witches, of course, also possess wanga, but use it for evil. The soothsayers enjoy very high standing and are the equals of the chiefs. They employ an oracle basket which contains a quantity of carved figures, both naturalistic and stylized, birds' feet, claws, bones, and stones. They shake up the contents of the basket and observe the position of the various objects, at the same time asking leading questions of the bystanders. The figure which comes out on top is the

decisive one. A grieving figure, for example, betokens death and misfortune. The soothsayers have to establish the causes of the illness and its course, predict pregnancy or death and much besides. Often witch-finder and soothsayer are one and the same person; but there are a few professional specialist witch-finders, usually people who easily fall into a trance and see visions. They may also be medicine men at the same time.

The witch-finder's most important aid is a large magic horn filled with medicine which can attract to it the magic in entire villages, and which has to be very strong, as the witches themselves use horns. They are fond of speaking with feigned voices, and know how to impress.

Both soothsayers and witch-finders select their own successors, thus it is not a hereditary profession. The soothsayer chooses someone who is possessed by a certain spirit, drives this spirit out and then instructs the selected one. Not the least important is the ability to sit sunk in meditation before the oracle basket with the mind removed from all else.

A necklace or cloak of bird's claws and a feather crown usually form part of the witch doctor's equipment.

The ordinary medicine man usually has nothing to do with these activities, yet he has sufficient to occupy him. He has to heal the sick, distribute magical remedies and drive spirits out of people possessed.

If a person starts raving, or behaves muddle-headedly, it means that a strange spirit has gone into him. The spirit is driven out by beating drums and raising a commotion and by the medicine man dancing, swinging his rattle and shouting incantations. Food is set out for the spirit to entice it. The medicine

man pretends to extract a number of small objects out of the patient's body, mostly with the help of a horn; these are the supposed causes of the illness.

It is also the medicine man who provides the public with magical specifics of all kinds, both for illness and misfortunes: these are horns or shells filled with medicine; carved images, skin bags, calabashes, bundles of claws, bones or feathers, and many other things. There is medicine for killing other people and for averting death, as there is for appropriating another's belongings and preventing yours from being stolen. These medicines have a dual effect. Then there is a large group of magical remedies against disease, others for promoting fertility and curing barrenness, and, lastly those which give good hunting.

The ancestral cult also permeates the whole life of the Chokwe. They make images of their forefathers out of clay or wood. The latter are often of considerable artistic value. The wooden images are mostly placed in the sleeping rooms, while the clay sculptures have special small huts like shrines. Poles, the tops of which are carved with the figures of ancestors, are set up outside the houses. The dead are with their relatives and descendants – you can hear them padding quietly after you. A hunter makes them offerings of blood and meat in boat-shaped troughs. Every now and again a sort of spiritualist seance is held, at which special mediums speak in the name of the dead. Those are evenings of feasting on beer and game, of which the ancestors receive their share.

In each Chokwe village there is a tree of life which the chief has planted for his ancestors. At this offerings are made to the dead rulers. Passers-by lay flour and meat at the foot of the tree, and it is there that a new chief is proclaimed. The planting of the tree is an

important event and is performed with considerable ceremony.

Even among the Chokwe you come across a number of demons, several of whom are personified by masks used at the rites of initiation.

WITCHES AND BLACK MAGIC

MANY AFRICANS ARE all too ready to suspect each other of witchcraft. An old chief can suddenly take it into his head that his first wife is intending to bewitch him just because she is reported as having had conferences with the witch doctor. The old man therefore sends for a different witch doctor, who, of course, finds it most advantageous to confirm the suspicions. And so the wife is executed in secret – just to be on the safe side.

Here is another example. Two men are out fishing together; the one catches a lot, the other nothing. The latter consults someone versed in magic and realizes that his friend had employed magic to enable him to get all the fish at the expense of the other. That puts an end to the friendship.

The Africans, however, have ways and means of getting rid of a dangerous witch and giving the deed a natural explanation. A lion or a crocodile must have been there, for there were only a few scraps of clothing left – so the authorities are told.

The white man punishes those who hunt out a witch and also those who kill him or her as a measure of public safety, while the actual witch goes free. That conflicts grossly with the Africans' idea of justice.

The Lalas of Rhodesia call those who practise black magic 'secret bringers of death'. They perform their deeds by means of poison, magic or assistant spirits. These latter may have the appearance of snakes or even of dwarfs. They do not only kill, but are also sent to steal from people; and if anyone begins to grow rich

rapidly he is likely to be suspected of having such beings in his service. It happens that a man who has a number of these spirits tells a blood-brother who has met with bad luck about the small ministering spirits which can steal their owner an entire fortune. He also makes his friend a present of a couple of those he has and instructs him in the medicine which makes the creatures invisible. All goes well for a time, but then the ministering spirits announce that they wish there were more of them. The only way in which they can multiply is by killing people. They creep up to a person and suck out his breath while he lies asleep. The person dies, but by blowing the breath in again the spirits transform the dead man into another like themselves. The owner of the ministering spirits is eventually compelled to send them to kill people with whom he has no quarrel and whom he wishes no harm. He is forced to take charge of his victims' spirits as well and finds that these too become bloodthirsty. Soon he is only too willing to relinquish as many spirits as he can. He can himself easily become suspect. The spirits are kept in small calabashes, but since they are invisible you cannot prove that someone is a witch just by investigating his calabashes.

Thus the number of spirits grows, and more and more people die. The witch doctor has to be called in, and he gets to work. The owner of the spirits is discovered and killed.

These spirits can kill in other ways than by sucking out a person's breath; they can also do it by causing a tree to fall on their victim to give the appearance of an accident. Many of these ministering spirits cannot live without killing. 'I want a man so as to eat his life,' says a ministering spirit in the form of a snake with a human head. Another murderous spirit has a

hippopotamus' head at either end, and with its two great jaws it eats its victim's shadow, whereupon death follows. These spirits the witch doctor has to search out in their haunts in the river, lure them out and kill them with a poisoned arrow. Then the owner dies as well.

Practitioners of black magic can, however, also perform their own evil deeds. To do that their souls leave their bodies which remain where they are. Stark naked and with burning eyes the witch-souls sweep through the night. From the roof of the hut they dive down upon their victims and suck out their spirit. The victim's soul being thus stolen, he soon dies. In actual fact, he died the moment he lost his soul, but people did not notice it at once. Children may never go out absolutely naked, they must have at least a string of beads or a piece of string round neck or arm. That is enough to prevent it being considered a witch-child. It is not the thing to point with just one finger – that is the witch's way – you must point with your whole hand.

To avenge yourself by witchcraft is very common. Once having got the habit, you can't stop, and such a witch will send out death even during sleep, when he is quite unconscious of doing so.

Witches are the enemies of fertility. The effect of bewitchment is that the milk of mothers and cows dries up, they become barren and men's virility declines. Those accused of witchcraft nearly always confess – as they used to do in Europe in the old days.

Witches know of a medicine which changes people's hearts and turns them into witches. The medicine can be swallowed or is put straight into the blood-stream through an open vein. 'She made a cut for me so that I go out naked with her at night.' You can take witch-medicine without knowing it, but usually it is taken

quite deliberately. Witchcraft can also be inherited. A family spirit may have taken possession of the woman in question. It does not necessarily mean that she practises witchcraft, but you have to keep an eye on her. It is mostly old women who are held to be witches even in Southern Rhodesia. 'Women have very ugly hearts,' it is said.

A person's death must have been caused either by a demon, a dead person's spirit, or because he or she was bewitched. There is no other reason for death. Usually it is the witch doctor's business to establish which of these possibilities caused the death. He also has to point out the guilty party if it is a case of bewitchment.

In Northern Rhodesia when a witch doctor discovers that the cause of illness has been a dead person's spirit, he washes his patient with a decoction of leaves and then calls upon the spirit to return to the grave. The grave is pointed out by the witch doctor, and then the corpse is dug up, the bones crushed to be used for medicine, and any other remains burned. After that the dead person's name is never mentioned. It is noteworthy that if anyone cohabits with a person of forbidden degree – which covers a far wider range of relatives with Africans than with us – then spirits which have themselves committed that crime come and kill the person concerned.

In Southern Rhodesia, when sorcery is suspected, the villagers go off to a diviner. Any who are unable to go, send instead a person to represent them. The object is now to establish whom the suspect may be. Discs are thrown for everybody, but it is also necessary that the suspect should eventually throw some in person. Only in that way can his guilt be definitely established.

The Ibo use the kola nut to disclose sorcerers. If an

epidemic breaks out, Ala's head priest has the great signal drum beaten and summons everybody to assemble. Kola nuts are laid on the place of sacrifice, and everybody has to go forward, pick up a nut in his or her mouth and eat it. When the criminal sorcerer's turn comes he is compelled to confess everything. Ala's power is so great that the guilty person confesses in front of all the assembled that he has killed, and whom. It is not only Ala, the goddess of earth, who is inimical to witches: so too is her husband, the god of thunder. It is most dangerous for witches to practise black magic during thunder or a storm.

It is held that the guilty one is often to be found in the dead person's family or among his neighbours. When the victim is a big chief with many wives and married children it may mean that hundreds of people are suspect.

In Nigeria the identity of the guilty party is often decided by poison ordeal. This can lead to appalling results when several hundred persons have to be tested. In the old days at least, many who participated in such a trial by poison died from the effects.

Ordeal and oracular pronouncement are quite commonly used in identifying witches. The Chokwe have only two forms of ordeal: by poison and hot water. Both informer and accused have to drain the poison. Similarly with the hot water: both must dip their hands in the vessel. In Rhodesia they have other forms as well as ordeal by poison. In the latter, the person to be tested is placed in such a way that he does not touch the ground. There is a poison test using birds. The first bird is to decide if it is a case of sorcery at all: 'If there is a witch here, so die!' However, the bird is given the medicine over and over again till it does die, so sorcery is always established. Another method,

somewhat reminiscent of our dowsing, is that of the sable antelope horn filled with medicine which two men hold above the head of each person in turn, while the medicine man swings his rattle and mumbles spells. When they come to the guilty party the horn begins irresistibly going up and down like a pump. The ordeal by hot water is also used, but for minor offences. It is also possible to see things in a bowl of water dyed black for medicine. The witch doctor has many ways of establishing who is guilty. He may employ a calabash containing bits of bone which rear up when he reaches the guilty person, or a medicine basket which is placed on people's heads in turn until it fastens on to that of the guilty party, so that the doctor can haul him or her along by pulling the basket. These are merely a few examples of ordeals in current use.

It sometimes happens, however, that a family or village tries to discover a witch for itself. What happens then is told in this account of a native eye-witness:

'They said: "There is a witch in our village, let us go and find out who is killing our relatives." Two good men were selected, one to see to medicine for the oracle's answer, the other to get medicine to cleanse the executioner-to-be from the blood-guilt. Then they caught fowls and carried them to the river. They spoke to the fowls and said: "Reveal now the truth to us. If someone is guilty you must die, if someone is innocent then live." They mixed the prophesying medicine on a stone and made little screws of leaves. Then they gave the medicine to the first fowl. It fell dead. They continued naming the various clans and giving fowls medicine till they came to one that died – for many just fluttered away. Then they went on naming the members of that clan. Another one died! Now they knew. The person concerned was an old man who lay

asleep in his hut. They got hold of his children and asked them if they knew of the matter. They denied it, and so did their mother. "We know nothing, just kill him," they answered.

'When it was quite dark they went to the village to question the man before they killed him. "Are you asleep in there?" "What is it?" "We have a little tobacco for you." "Thanks, dear friends." They had all come and were standing outside, also the young men who had gone to cut sticks to whip him, those who had got ropes to bind him, and those who had fetched forked sticks to strangle him. He got up and opened the door. Immediately one crept in, then another, then the one after the other. They said: "Hurry up and tell us what demon it is." Then they seized him, bound him and left him alone in the hut. They all slept outside the hut by great fires. When day broke they twisted his wrists to get him to admit that he had killed people. He said: "You lie; I am an honest man, I don't kill people." They threw him down and poured water over him. He said: "No, it is a lie!" Then they began to throttle him with a cleft stick. Then *it* [at this point the narrator ceased to refer to him as a person] said: "Oh children, I am to die, and I have killed many!" Then *it* began to count on its fingers: "This one and that one have I killed and this person and this and another, what is it he was called again?" *It* reckoned and reckoned, twittering like a bird. Then it was already evening. Those present lie where they are by the fires in the open. They are all very indignant: "In the morning, when day breaks," they say to each other.

'Early the next morning they go away to a remote place in the jungle. They have fastened the heads of the dead fowls to *its* head and now drag it along the ground. They lay *it* there. The selected one gives *it* a

blow with an axe on the nape of the neck and then drives a stake from the roof-truss of the hut repeatedly through *its* body. Then he leaps up and tramples on *it* with jubilant shouts. Everyone dances and dances in triumph, and when they have danced again and again there is peace once more in the land.'

The danger has been diverted from the village. There is an end to furtive whisperings, to fear and to people dying. So people believe and are happy – till the next time.

This belief in witches is just as strong among the Chokwe in Angola. While the witch doctors, the legitimate professional magicians, use medicine having magical powers only for beneficial purposes, the witches use theirs only for black, evil deeds. These witches may be in possession of great magical power. They can eat the souls of their fellow men. They can kill them directly or by means of lethal magic, but only at night. If a witch is pointed out by the legitimate magicians, he or she must die a painful death. In the old days they were burned bit by bit, the limbs being cut off one by one and thrown on to a fire, or the guilty one would be laid between two fires and charred gradually. In other cases the victim was tied to a tree and allowed to die of hunger and thirst. The Portuguese authorities now compel people to content themselves with a beating or fine as the punishment for witchcraft.

Witches, as we have already said, can eat a person's spirit. This is done by means of a long wooden tube, a hollowed out tree-trunk, which they put close to the wall of the hut in which the victim lies and through it suck out the soul. The witch is surrounded by ministering spirits in the shape of various small nocturnal animals, such as rats. Witches often insert by magic a

small stone, a lump of earth or some other object into their victim's body in order to kill him, but a legitimate witch doctor will suck out the cause of sickness if he is summoned.

Those who practise witchcraft can also make people their slaves merely by dropping an object having magical power – a horn for a man, a carving for a woman – on to the ground just beside the person selected, who must then inexorably follow the sorcerer for ever. If such a man-catcher arrives in the vicinity of a village, he first finds out whether there is already any colleague of his in the village, which he does by blowing a horn. If there is an answering signal, it means that the place is already occupied and the newcomer hastens away. Witches and sorcerers will not tolerate competition.

In Nigeria they even set up a society to combat witchcraft. If a person was seriously suspected of practising black magic, the society did away with him if it could. He was killed by night. Slaves were often sacrificed on the pretext that they practised black magic, and afterwards their bodies were divided up and eaten.

Witches are held to have nocturnal meetings with evil demons. They suck their victims' blood without it being felt and without being seen until only the husk is left of them. In Nigeria, witches had to be burned, as they were in Europe in the old days, and every household in the village contributed its bundle of wood to the pyre.

Witches are believed to have their own secret society with a particularly expert sorcerer at its head. There is supposed to be such a witches' coven in every village or district. Their purpose is merely to do evil.

When someone falls ill the nature of the illness is

usually kept a most careful secret so that the witches shall not find out and take the opportunity to send evil influences. However, they get the blame if the sick person dies.

Each member of the coven is bound by a ghastly oath not to reveal anything about it, but in return is vested with supernatural strength and the power to transform herself – a witch can assume the shape of any animal if she wants. A secret poisonous powder which they take gives them this magic ability. They hold dreadful orgies, at which they kill and eat their own children. The dangerous stuff they use is supposed to be a kind of powder which is blown on the wind at the victim, strewn in his path or smuggled into his food or drink.

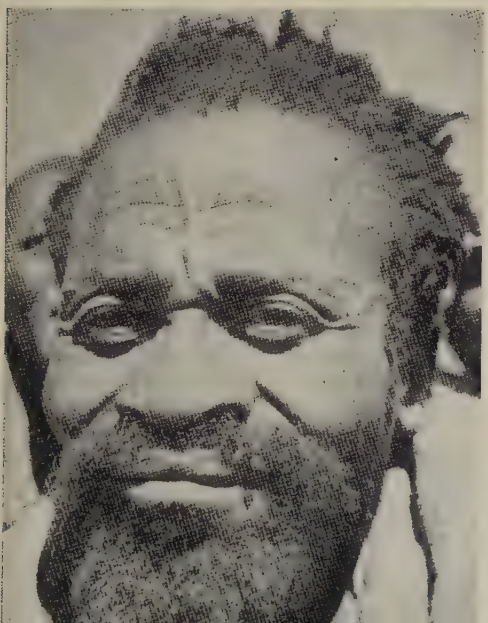
Black magic, witchcraft and sorcery are always on the offensive, while innocuous white magic is only used as a protection against the black. It is only barren or elderly women no longer able to have children who are accused of being witches – a proof of the respect in which motherhood is held.

Let me conclude with something which happened to Frank Hives, when he was in Nigeria. He himself makes no comment on it, and all that need be said here is that among the Ibo it is believed that those versed in magic have a certain power over snakes. The Ibo do not kill certain snakes, which indeed are the objects of a certain cult.

One day Hives saw a crowd at the gate of his compound – which was an unusual thing to happen unless some criminal had been caught red-handed and was being brought along, or something of that kind. In front of the crowd stood the most horrible old woman he had ever seen. She was dressed in nothing but a ragged and dirty loin-cloth which scarcely reached her

Swazi warriors in everyday garb.

Swazi types.



The witch doctor holding a seance – Southern Rhodesia.

Filling the water pots – South Africa.

calloused old knees. The colour of her skin was unusually dark and she was very wrinkled and shrivelled. Her hair was parted in a number of short plaits and round her neck she had amulets of bones, teeth and other things. She had bracelets and anklets shaped like snakes and held something in her hands which at first sight he took for a live snake, though in actual fact it was a piece of charred cane which she turned and twisted in such a way that at a distance it could easily be taken for a snake.

Her one and only eye, bloodshot, glared at poor Hives and she burst into a flood of curses and began dancing round him with surprising agility and twiddling the stick so that it looked as though the 'snake' was intending to bite him.

At first Hives could not understand the reason for the performance. He had never seen the old crone before and so could scarcely have offended her. The people behind her stood in silence, but their eyes were popping out of their heads. They were obviously expecting to see the old woman drop dead by the white man's magical power, or else that her curses should put an end to him. If he had understood what she was saying, Hives no doubt could have apprehended her for abusing an official, or have shut her up as a lunatic, but he gave no orders either way and just stood there staring at her as though hypnotized. Suddenly she stopped, threw her stick at him – it grazed his chest – and disappeared; whereupon the crowd dispersed.

When he had collected his wits Hives asked his interpreter what it was all about. He was told that the woman was the mother of a black youth who had been imprisoned and that she was a very, very evil witch. She considered Hives responsible for her son's mis-

fortune and intended to pay him back. The interpreter maintained that she had power over snakes of all kinds, even at a distance. He refused to repeat what she had said, but it was evident that it was the snake curse she had vented on the white man, and that meant that from then on he was to be followed everywhere by snakes, day and night. A nasty death awaited him before very long.

Hives told his people to keep a sharp look-out for snakes and to see that people did not try to smuggle any in. He knew that they would keep a good watch in any event, for they were pretty frightened.

That day nothing happened, but the next afternoon when he went into his bedroom there was a large, beautifully marked snake coiled up just below the pillow. It raised its head and hissed, its forked tongue darting in and out. Hives went at once to the door – he was unarmed – and called for his servants to bring sticks. They came running up with bamboo canes. The snake met its death just as it stuck its head out through the door, having apparently followed him.

From then on he was persecuted by snakes. They popped up everywhere: one was in his boot just as he was going to put it on; a couple were killed in his office where one had coiled round a chair and another, a very small one, fell out when he got an envelope. In three days they killed fifteen snakes – all in places which he frequented. They were of all sorts and kinds, so there could be no question of there having been a nest nearby.

Hives began to grow nervous and his servants were almost beside themselves. Then he decided to leave the station for a while and see if that helped. His porters were sent on ahead and he himself was to follow them with his interpreter by bicycle a little while later. Just

as he was about to leave his office a black snake fell from the roof close beside him. Had it fallen on him, he could have said good-bye to everything, for it was very venomous and there was no doctor on the station then.

His going away did no good, for snakes kept popping up. The first thing he saw when he reached the first stopping-place was several specimens sunning themselves on the mud wall of the veranda. That night before he had fallen asleep he heard something fall into the top of his mosquito net. The net dropped almost on to his face and when he put up his hand he could feel the coils of a snake. He did not dare leap out of bed, for the net was tucked in under the mattress and if he removed one side it would let the roof go slack, so that the snake would be on top of him before he could get away. Fortunately the net was new and held, heavy though the snake was. He wondered what would happen if the net broke and the snake and he were both trying to get out of it.

He shouted for his servants, calling to them to bring lights. Luckily they heard him at once and came with lamps.

'A snake! A snake! Be careful. Bring sticks and kill it!' he shouted, never thinking how that might be difficult with the snake hanging so near his face.

His servants came tumbling out and dropped the lanterns. One broke and the paraffin began burning. That put him in a nasty position. If he remained where he was, he risked being burned to death; and if he crawled out the snake would bite him. By then, however, he could see the snake circling round and round trying to get out of the trap into which it had fallen. It was obviously just as anxious to get free as he was.

It looked as though the mosquito net might catch

fire at any moment and something had to be done. Cautiously he began undoing the net at the foot of the bed, where he thought he might be able to remove it from under the mattress without the roof sinking in. And all the time he kept shouting for his servants and the policemen to come and put the fire out. Finally, just as he was crawling out feet first, two of the policemen arrived. He got on to his feet all right, but did not dare move in case there were more snakes. The policemen threw sand on the fire and fetched other lights, and meanwhile Hives got into his mosquito boots.

They brought him his shotgun, but he was reluctant to shoot the snake in the mosquito net as it was the only one he had. One of the police poked the snake down with a bamboo and Hives shot it the moment it reached the floor. Thinking the shot had missed – the snake contorted itself in its convulsions in such a way that it appeared to be making straight at him – he gave it the other barrel as well. That was unnecessary and merely made a mess of the snake and his bed.

The house was searched carefully, but no more snakes were discovered, so he lay down again with a lighted lamp, revolver and mosquito boots close at hand. His men returned to their quarters, which, as always in that part of the world, lay a little way from the main building. Suddenly he heard a terrified shout from there; he pulled on his boots, picked up his revolver and ran to it.

His men were huddled by the door, quite beside themselves with terror. They insisted that a snake had crawled across them while they lay asleep on their mats. No one, however, had been bitten.

They searched, but could find no snake. Nothing, however, would induce the men to go into the hut

again. They now thought that the curse had been extended to them. They hadn't minded when the white man was the only one affected – for they imagined that white people were not so susceptible to snake poison as they. That night there was no sleep for anybody.

Hives determined that he must at all cost get hold of the witch and have it out with her. He returned to the station but said nothing there of what had happened, though his men undoubtedly had a lot to tell. That afternoon he had occasion to go into his bedroom, where his baggage was still unpacked. On some boxes was a large black snake; when it caught sight of him it tried to crawl up the wall, but fell down.

Hives accidentally wounded himself in the foot when killing this snake and went into hospital. On his return he managed to get hold of the witch and frightened her so thoroughly by threatening to send his false teeth after her that she gave in and thereafter no more snakes came to trouble him.

THE WHITE MAN'S JUJU

LET ME END with an account of some episodes where the white man has shown that his juju is stronger than that of the black man, or where circumstances have attributed to him supernatural powers.

A medical missionary in Rhodesia has told the following story:

He was feeling very annoyed because a pair of curved medical scissors had disappeared from his instrument case, when a visit from the chief was announced. 'This will be about that termagant, his eldest wife – I treated her some days ago,' thought the missionary. But the chief had come on a different errand. He told the missionary that his eldest wife had accused the youngest of infidelity. She said that she had surprised the couple in the forest and seized hold of the man's cloak, but it had torn and she had been left with just a scrap in her hand. Both the accused denied her story. In such cases the matter should by custom have been decided by all concerned thrusting their hands into a pot of boiling water and picking an object from its bottom. Those who were speaking the truth would not scald themselves. The chief, however, did not wish to have his wives' hands damaged – they had their work to do– and he had come to ask the wise white man for advice. He produced the cloak and the scrap that had been torn off it. The white man's face cleared. The cloth had not been torn, but cut – and with whose scissors? 'Send a man to your eldest wife's hut and have him search until he finds a pair of curved scissors,' said the white man. 'When they are found, the innocence of

your youngest wife will be proved – at least on this occasion,' he added cautiously. The intrigue was obvious. The old woman had purloined the scissors while she was in the surgery and had snipped a piece off the youth's cloak when he was not looking so as to have her proof. The scissors were duly found. The chief was so impressed that he asked to be baptized. His eldest wife, however, had no opportunity of going over to a more gentle religion, for as was reported, she had the misfortune to encounter a lion which apparently was dreadfully hungry, for there wasn't even a snippet of her cloak left.

Another story: the elders of a village came to the British District Officer complaining that a curse had been put upon their community. Several people were ill, one had got a snake in his stomach (so at least it felt!) and some had died. 'We realized it was sorcery,' they told him. 'We had refused to pay a man from another village a sum he asked, and so he had told a witch doctor to bewitch us. A necklace of threaded seeds had been found hanging up by the entrance to the village; and that, of course, was the thing which was exerting the spell; they had no doubt that it had been hung there by a witch doctor.' Witch doctors are not responsible, as we have already seen, for thus helping to kill people with their magic. They are but carrying out a commission. They prepare the magical medicine and that then works quite automatically. What these elders wanted was the help of the authorities and they asked the District Officer to call in another witch doctor. They pointed out that the black man's magic did not affect the white man.

The District Officer paid a visit to the village, found that its water-hole was appallingly dirty and had that cleaned before he did anything else. Naturally, he did

not call in a witch doctor. Then he happened to hear, 'from a little gust of wind' as the natives call gossip, that the villagers had gone to the witch doctor and promised him several cows if he would take off the curse. After some haggling and parleying the witch doctor agreed. He had a goat slaughtered, removed its stomach, put the necklace inside it and buried it. The spirit of the disease was now underground. But then the witch doctor repented the bargain and asked for a young girl as an additional fee for keeping the disease away altogether. At that point the District Officer took the opportunity to arrest the witch doctor for some other mischief he had been up to. The epidemic was arrested, because the water-hole had been cleaned, and the villagers were amazed at the white man's strong magic which had overcome both the spirit of the disease and the witch doctor.

The Ibo believe that dead people's souls can become embodied in certain animals or in lifeless objects. As far as the animals are concerned it is however more usual for them to be considered as being possessed by evil and dangerous spirits. A juju animal can be kept in the temple and greatly feared and respected.

The following episode shows how great is the natives' reliance on the power of such jujus.

A certain District Commissioner heard a commotion outside his compound. He went out into his veranda and saw a native coming running towards the house as hard as he could go. He was dressed in nothing but a loin cloth and had a sack with something in it under his arm. Some of the black policemen were running after him, others tried to catch him as he rushed past. But he twisted and swerved and was hard to hold since he was slippery with sweat. The police seemed to think that he was intent on some evil, but

he was unarmed. He did not even have a knife. He made straight towards the white man and leaped over the low mud wall of the veranda. The policemen rushed at him, but the D.C. halted them.

There then stood the poor wretch in front of the white man, panting and with starting eyes. Before he said anything he took his sack and opened it: out fell two human heads which, judging by appearances, had been severed several days previously and obviously not kept in cold storage. One of them rolled to the Englishman's feet and the stench rose straight to his nose.

'My brothers,' said the native pointing at the heads. 'What are you going to do about it?'

'I could not answer him at once,' says the District Commissioner in his account. 'I got hold of a piece of paper, pressed it to my nose and jumped over the wall into the fresh air. I was on the point of being violently sick, but managed to control myself and avoid what the natives would have considered an exhibition of weakness.

'Then I told the policemen to take the man to the palaver house and to take charge of the heads. After that I summoned the prison-warder and told him to have the prisoners clean the veranda. Nevertheless it was weeks before we got rid of the smell.'

The story he was told was that the Negro's brothers had been murdered in a village of evil repute. There was no doubt that the murderers had feasted on their bodies, while the heads had been hung up as trophies. The surviving brother had managed to seize them and run off without being discovered. He now demanded that the white chief should punish the criminals.

The D.C. took the few men he had and set out. The way took him through a district in which the natives were by no means well disposed and where he and his

few men could not have done much if it had come to a fight. He had an encounter with some of them which was quite dramatic.

As the group of natives drew near he saw that they were behaving most impertinently, simply pushing his policemen and porters off the road. It was a deliberate, planned insult and the D.C. made a careful note of it, but at that moment he could not do anything about it. He had no proper force at his disposal and, even if he had, he would not have been allowed to use it, for such were his orders. It was a challenge which he could not take up, and he took himself off the road before the group came up.

Just as the natives were level with him a young shapely woman with a basket on her head said something which the white man of course did not understand, but which made the other women guffaw. Thereupon a young man rushed up to the girl and severed her head from her body with one blow of his knife.

The Englishman felt sick and would gladly have retaliated in kind, but he knew only too well that it would merely have cost his own life and that of his men. He pretended not to have seen a thing and continued the march to all appearances quite unmoved. He did not even once look round, though every moment he expected to feel a knife in his back. It must have taken some doing.

As soon as they were out of earshot he asked his interpreter what the woman had said, and was told that she had called out – loud enough for the other women and also her husband to hear:

'Ah, there (pointing at the Englishman) is a nice straight-haired man with whom I will sleep to-night.'

That little joke had evidently been too much for her

jealous husband. Also she had publicly jeered at him, and he would make himself ridiculous if he did not react. His reaction had indeed been violent. She at least would never be able to do such a thing again. The Englishman felt himself to a certain extent responsible for the tragedy and was careful after that to keep his topee on so that no more native 'ladies' might be lost in admiration of his straight hair.

That episode is an example of the natives' mentality and shows what customs the white man has had to try to mitigate.

The D.C. now reached the village next to that where the two brothers had been murdered. He wanted the chiefs of those villages to go on with him, but they refused to do this, making all sorts of excuses. They also advised him most earnestly not to go on himself. In actual fact the chiefs were afraid of something happening to him, in which case they would be brought to book later for not accompanying him.

The eldest of the chiefs said that if they met a white goat, then all would go well; otherwise they would all be killed. The Englishman told him to go to the devil and was very angry, for it was a deliberate attempt to scare his men, because the old chief, of course, knew that the juju in the village of ill-repute was a *black* goat.

As they drew near the village they went very carefully, examining the thickets so as not to fall into an ambush and keeping close together. Then they heard the sound of drums and singing. The path grew broader and soon turned into a regular avenue with fields on either side. The view was open, so there was no more danger of ambush. The D.C. who had quite forgotten the old chief's warning about the goat was suddenly reminded of it. The Negroes at the head of the little column stopped and when the Englishman hurried

up he saw them terror-struck staring at a black goat which was tethered in the middle of the road. It was bleating and vainly trying to free itself. The Negroes were filled with horror: they had all heard what the old chief had said. Neither courage nor daring would serve now, for the goat was the guardian of the village, the juju.

The Englishman's men huddled in a group whispering fearfully among themselves. At any moment they might have turned and fled. Not even the interpreter who considered himself 'civilized' looked as though he dared go on. The D.C. cursed and swore, as he shamefully confesses, but nothing could get those men to approach the goat.

The D.C. took a rapid decision: the goat would have to be 'sacrificed'. Its innocent life would have to be taken in order to save others. He seized a sharp machete from one of his men, rushed up to the goat and succeeded in severing its head with one blow. The expression of horror that then appeared on the men's faces was not one he would ever forget. They were petrified with fright and just waiting for whatever dreadful thing was to happen to them all.

The Englishman did not wait. In a brusque tone of command he ordered them to take up position round the goat facing the village and told them to shoot the first person to appear. Then he made his porters fetch fuel and make a fire, which they did in fear and trembling. The D.C. then impaled the goat's head on a stake and set it up in the middle of the path. He ordered the Negroes to skin and dismember the goat, but they did not dare and he had to do it himself as best he could. He cut off some bits of meat – not very neatly – and draped them over the stick in front of the fire. Soon a lovely smell of roasting meat spread around. The

Englishman had by now managed to get his personal servants to help him, in particular the cook whose professional instincts seemed to have been aroused.

Soon after that the Englishman noticed that the drumming in the village had stopped. Perhaps they were already aware of what he had done and were taking counsel. He then took one of the bits of meat which was almost cooked and began to eat it, pretending that it was good, though it cost him an effort to get the stuff down. The smell of it drew the Negroes closer and closer. One after the other came up to the fire, all the time watching intently to see whether the sacrilege was doing him any harm. Gradually they began to eat too, waiting to feel the effect of every chew, and before very long almost the whole goat had been eaten. Then their courage returned. The Englishman had vanquished the juju, for his was stronger. The hostile Negroes also submitted and the little expedition was able to fulfil its task.

One last anecdote to show that there can be risks involved in being thought to possess supernatural powers. The English are a practical people and one of the D.C.'s in a certain part of Nigeria had learned conjuring especially in order to be able to impress a certain savage and unsubdued tribe which came under him. At the feast given to welcome him he gave a regular conjuring performance which made a deep impression. He caught coins in the air, produced others from people's ears, had his hands tied and freed them while they were covered with a cloth, and several other tricks of that kind. As a finale he cut a piece off a yam and made it seem to disappear through the navel of the chief's son and into his belly. In the middle of the night, however, there was an appalling commotion and a crowd of people came to him carrying the

chief's son whom, they said, was very ill. The bit of yam had apparently had an eye on it and it had started to grow in the man's stomach causing him fearful pangs. He did indeed look as though he were dying. The white man cursed his thoughtlessness in not conjuring the bit of yam out again. He managed to slip away long enough to cut a similar piece, and, returning, he rubbed the dying man's belly and pretended to pull out the *corpus delecti*. There was wild jubilation; the dying man got to his feet, rubbed his stomach and calmly went his way, quite cured.

It is easy to imagine the respect in which the D.C. was held after that.

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